

*Mary Elizabeth's Other Guides (published by Garlic Press):*

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- The Odyssey: A Teaching Guide*
- Lord of the Flies: A Teaching Guide*
- The Giver: A Teaching Guide*
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- The Hunger Games: A Teaching Guide*
- Catching Fire: A Teaching Guide*
- Mockingjay: A Teaching Guide*

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A powerful voice from Africa's young generation, *Tall as the Baobab Tree* poignantly depicts a family struggling to find its footing at the outer edge of the modern world ...where questions of right and wrong are not always black and white.

## About This Guide

### One Guide, Many Uses

*Tall as the Baobab Tree* is an inspiring film that needs no special reason for watching other than wanting to enjoy a good story. But it's also a film that provides a window of life into another culture, delving deeply into some wide-ranging themes. This discussion guide aims to serve a broad range of interests, including:

- Middle and High school classes in Global Studies/Social Studies; World Languages; Media Literacy, Digital Storytelling, Performing Arts, Language Arts, Ethics/Civics
- University and college courses in African studies, Women's Studies, Education, Economics, and Film Studies
- Community and public library film groups
- Faith-based groups

### Choosing Guide Elements to Match Your Approach

We address the special interests of such groups by starting with materials leading to a general understanding of the film, followed by materials that are specifically designed to serve the special interests listed above. Since *Tall as the Baobab Tree* interweaves many themes and topics, learning material that addresses different specialized subject areas is also included in the general understanding section.



## National Standards Correlations

The Common Core Standards specify in the “Range of Text Types for 6–12” chart in Standard 10 that film is included in the category of dramatic literature. Drama, it says, “Includes one-act and multi-act plays, both in written form and on film” [*Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects* (hereafter CCSS ELA+) p. 57].

This study guide is designed so that in interpreting the film using the basic questions, one addresses the nine key understandings expressed by the first 9 College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading and contributes to independent comprehension of complex texts (standard 10, CCSS ELA+, p. 35).

### Key Ideas and Details

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
3. Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

### Craft and Structure

4. Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
6. Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

# **Preparing to View *Tall as the Baobab Tree***

## **Watching the Film**

It is best to watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* in a single, uninterrupted sitting. This is because a film is meant to be an immersive experience with dramatic tension and thematic imagery that builds over time.

However, if you need to segment your screening, we suggest ending the first session at approximately the **42-minute mark**. There is a natural “midpoint” in the story at this time, with **40 minutes remaining** in the film.

## **About the Film**

### **Synopsis**

Coumba and her little sister Debo are the first to leave their family’s remote African village, where meals are prepared over open fires and water is drawn from wells, to attend school in the bustling city.

But when an accident suddenly threatens their family’s survival, their father decides to sell 11-year-old Debo into an arranged marriage. Torn between loyalty to her elders and her dreams for the future, Coumba hatches a secret plan to rescue her young sister from a fate she did not choose.

A powerful voice from Africa’s young generation, *Tall as the Baobab Tree* poignantly depicts a family struggling to find its footing at the outer edge of the modern world, where questions of right and wrong are not always black and white.

### **Credits**

**Director:** Jeremy Teicher

**Screenwriters:** Jeremy Teicher, Alexi Pappas

**Director of Photography:** Chis Collins

**Editor:** Sofi Marshall

**Composers:** Jay Wadley

Kora Musician: Salieu Suso

**Producer:** Mala Bawer

## **About the Director and the Production of the Film**

*Tall as the Baobab Tree* was shot on location in a rural Senegalese village without electricity featuring local villagers to acting in roles that mirror their actual lives and speaking in their native Pulaar language.

The film is inspired by true stories the Director, Jeremy Teicher discovered in Senegal as a Dartmouth College student while filming a short documentary, “This Is Us,” which was nominated for a Student Academy Award in 2011.

Jeremy Teicher was just 22 years old when he began production of this film, just a few years older than the village students whose stories moved him.

## **Director's Statement**

*"Tall as the Baobab Tree* is about standing up for your beliefs and doing what you feel is right, no matter what. To me, the film speaks to the energy and idealism of youth while portraying a very stark and realistic world where change is two steps forward and one step back, where the invincibility of youth bends beneath the harsh realities of life – but is not stamped out. Working in collaboration with local students from the village of Sinthiou Mbadane, Senegal, we set out to tell a story that captures the emotions of the traditional and modern worlds colliding.

Rural African village life is now in the midst of a transformation. A new generation, with access to school for the first time in history, is coming of age. Roads from the city stretch deeper into the countryside and straw huts are steadily being replaced by new, concrete buildings. I wanted to tell a story that captures the emotions of the old and new worlds colliding. *Tall as the Baobab Tree* explores the tensions, quiet victories, and heartbreaks that come with change."

- *Jeremy Teicher, Director*



## **Before Viewing Discussion**

### **Questions**

You may wish to have students record answers to these questions so that they can return to them after watching the film.

- This is a film about life in an African village.
  - What types of things do you know about rural African life?
  - Do you have any expectations before the film starts?
  - Have you seen any news or photographs or read anything about the people there?
  - How do you think people your age spend their time in a rural African village?
- What is a baobab tree?
  - What is the typical height of a baobab tree?
  - Does the title of the film give you any hint about what the film is about?
- This is the story of a girl who has to make a difficult moral choice.
  - Have you ever had to choose between accepting a situation that seemed wrong to you or doing something wrong to try to fix it? If so, how did you handle this dilemma?
  - If you have not personally been in this situation, try to think of a book, television, or film character who has faced this situation and answer the above questions from that character's point of view.
- The film focuses on child marriage, which refers to girls who are forced to marry before the age of 18, sometimes as young as 11 or 12.
  - What are your opinions on this issue?
  - Why do you think child marriage persists today?
- How would you define poverty?
  - How is rural poverty, where a family owns a home and raises their own food, different from urban poverty?
  - What factors could make rural poverty more challenging than urban poverty?
- This film is not a documentary, but it is historically accurate. Given this description, which aspects of the film would you expect to be fictional and which true?
- Read the Director's Statement.
  - What kinds of clashes do you think might occur between the traditional and the modern world in the circumstances the director describes?
  - Why would children be in a challenging position during such change?

## **Guided Viewing Prompts**

Here are a variety of prompts to help viewers focus their attention:

- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to identify how economics is at the root of this rural African family's challenges.
- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to see the various ways in which modern and traditional cultures clash and identify the attitudes of different characters towards change.
- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to learn the problem Coumba faces and how she attempts to solve it.
- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to understand the role that faith plays in the family's decisions and attitudes.
- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to see how the film crew dealt with the challenges of filming in rural Senegal.
- Watch *Tall as the Baobab Tree* to identify the role of education in the story, attitudes towards education, and what benefits education may provide.

## **The Elements of Filming**

The Glossary of Film Terms section will introduce you to some of the key techniques available to filmmakers by explaining some fundamental terminology. You may wish to introduce this vocabulary provided prior to viewing in order to facilitate discussion.

## **After Viewing Discussion**

### **Follow-up on Before Viewing Discussion**

If you used the before viewing questions or guided viewing prompts you may wish to begin your discussion of the film with questions such as these:

- Did the village and people in the film challenge any of your preconceived images of rural Africans? Explain. What was the source of the preconceptions that have now been disproved?
- How is the family in the film similar to yours? How are the children and expectations concerning children similar to and different from you and your experience?
- In the film, the young generation and the older generation feel differently about following traditions. What did they agree on, nevertheless? Are there any conflicts between the older and younger generations in your region or country?
- Did your initial feelings about child marriage change after seeing the film? Based on what you saw in the film, why is child marriage such a challenging issue in rural Africa and other parts of the developing world?

- In the film, did you find any evidence of a difference between the children who go to school and the children who don't? Are there any such cultural differences amongst children in the region or country where you live?
- How do you think the actors and the other villagers feel about the film? Explain your thoughts.

## **Narrative vs. Drama**

All narrative has—by definition—at least one narrator, someone who tells the story. In some cases this narrative is the author, as in autobiography. In literature, the narrator can be a character or someone whose identity is never defined. Drama, most typically, has no narrator. The audience is in direct contact with the characters, the setting, etc. And yet, the film mediates between the viewer and the events shown.

- Discuss how the choices referred to in the Glossary of Film Terms can be used to shape a film's story and compare and contrast using these techniques with using a narrator.
- Discuss how techniques could be used to impose the director's view on material.
- Discuss how techniques could be used to attempt objectivity.

## **Setting**

Setting refers to both the world in which the story takes place and the changing scenery that serves as the backdrop for each scene. Setting includes what the characters can sense in their environment.

- Describe the various settings in the film. How are they similar? How are they different? Setting may simply be the backdrop to the story, or it can serve other functions related to theme and characterization. Setting may also be symbolic or create conflicts for the characters, hindering the characters in achieving their goal(s), or creating physical hardships that are difficult to overcome. Setting can also provide materials or resources that help the characters solve problems.
- What are the functions of setting in *Tall as the Baobab Tree*? Identify scenes in which setting takes on different roles. How does the baobab tree function as part of the setting?

## **Characters**

A character in a story is someone or something whose actions, choices, thoughts, ideas, words, interactions, and/or influence are important in developing the plot. Characters are often people, but also include other living creatures, and sometimes even non-living things. A force, such as good or evil, can operate as a character in a story.

Most stories have a single character or a small group of characters whose goal or problem is the core of the plot. This character or group of characters is called the *protagonist*. The character, group, or force that opposes the protagonist is called the *antagonist*.

- Identify the protagonist in *Tall as the Baobab Tree*.
- Is there an antagonist in the film? Explain.

*Characterization* is the name for the techniques used to reveal the personality—the identifiable traits —of the characters to the viewer. In films, characterization is achieved in a number of different ways: words, appearance, action, choices and interactions.

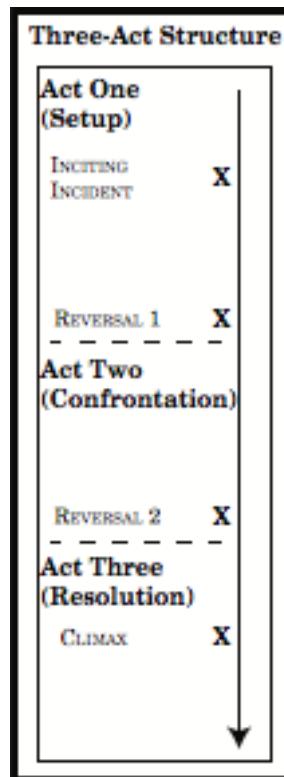
- How would you characterize Coumba? Debo? Their mother? Their father? The teacher? Amady? Sileye? The Village Elder? Amady's friends?
- Discuss how Coumba's family functions as an economic unit. How does this view of the family elucidate the action of the film?
- How are the cattle important in the film? Do they function as part of the setting? As a character? Explain.
- There's a saying, "There's two sides to every story," but often there are more than two sides. Which characters in *Tall as the Baobab Tree* express a unique viewpoint? Enunciate each character's beliefs and why they think as they do. Does the film validate or undercut their positions by the way it treats them? How does it do this?
- Which characters in the film were adamant and unyielding in their stance? In each case, what was their justification for being unwilling to be swayed?
- Why do you think that the village elder gives the advice he does? Is keeping promises only a traditional value or is it also a modern value?
- Identify the conversations in *Tall as the Baobab Tree* in which two people with different opinions confront each other. What methods of persuasion are used? Is anyone's opinion changed? Why was the persuasion effective or ineffective? Or were other factors besides persuasion at work? If so, explain.
- Coumba sought help and advice from several people. Describe each conversation. Did she receive what she wanted in any of these cases? Why or why not?
- What does money mean to the characters who mention or use it in the film?
- What did the inclusion of Amady contribute to the story?
- What does ability to climb a baobab reveal about a character in the world of the movie? Which characters climb the baobab and why? Do you consider the baobab a symbol? If so, what does it symbolize?
- Coumba has the traditional facial tattoo of her village. Debo does not. How is this ironic?
- How is the characters' shared belief in God manifest in the film? What role(s) does faith play in their lives?
- How did Sileye's discussion with Amady make you feel? Explain.
- Explain how various film techniques are used to reveal Debo's and Coumba's relationship.
- What will Debo miss out on by being married at age 11? What will Coumba miss with her sister gone? Do you think Coumba will accept an arranged marriage

## Plot

Screenplays and television scripts are often written with a three-part division and a somewhat standardized pattern of action. Early in Act I is the *inciting incident*—the occurrence or fact that changes something and sets the plot in motion. A reversal towards the end of Act I dramatically shifts the territory—it can be a positive shift or a negative shift. Act II is filled with confrontations, as the protagonist works to achieve her goal and also ends with a reversal. Act III contains the *climax*—the moment of highest tension and the point at which the ending becomes inevitable. After that the filmmaker chooses how to move on to tie up loose ends and conclude the story.

- Analyze *Tall as the Baobab Tree* using the Three-Act structure diagram shown to the right.

Enunciate the situation that the father of the family finds himself in vis-à-vis tradition and change at the beginning of the film. What choices has he made in relation to these two forces prior to the beginning of the film? What happens that leads him to call his decision into question?



- Describe Coumba's life at the start of the film. What are Coumba's initial goals? How do her goals change through the course of the film? What steps does she take to try to achieve her goals?
- Coumba tries to save her sister from an arranged marriage. What does she do to try to effect this? How do other characters contribute to Coumba's efforts?
- Explain how the economic realities of life for this family are responsible for the plot of the film.
- What is the last line of the film? Who speaks it? What meaning do you take from this?
- Coumba and Amady are caught between town life and village life, their schooling and the traditions of their village. Identify the scenes in which this tension is played out. What does each character value in the two different parts of their lives?
- What do you think the end of the film means? Explain why you think as you do, being sure to make reference to the title of the film. What do you think will happen to Debo? What will happen to Sileye? Do you think Amady and Coumba will achieve their goals? How might the village change as more of its children become educated?

## Themes

These can be used to jumpstart discussion by asking participants to describe how the theme plays out in the film, by assessing the theme's relative importance in the overall story, and by asking whether certain themes correspond with any specific characters.

respect	children as part of a family economic unit vs. children as individuals
tradition	children's duty to parents and parents' duties to children
responsibility	the role of elders in society
ethical behavior	the importance of keeping promises
women's rights	what marriage means
children's rights	the roles of father and mother
the value of education	hard choices
village life vs. city life	the role of faith in dealing with life's challenges
tradition vs. innovation	friendship
needs vs. wants	sacrifice

## **Special Interest Section**

### **African Studies/Social Studies/Global Studies**

- Locate Senegal on a map of Africa. Explore the size of the continent of Africa and the population compared to the USA. What affect do you think these features have on life in Senegal and West Africa?
- Have students explore the meaning of the term “developing world” or “developing country.” What other countries are included? What percentage of the world’s population is included? What does the term infer? How do countries in the developing world differ from countries in the developed world? In what ways is this film representative of the “developing world” as a whole? In what ways does it only reflect the particular situation that it shows?
- In general, how does looking at different cultures and ways of life help us understand our own beliefs and behavior? What did you gain from this film in particular?
- Imagine a group of villagers from the film arriving in your neighborhood. What behavior or cultural norms might they misunderstand or criticize? Are there aspects of the film that you think are likely to be misinterpreted? Explain.
- Because the medical bills for Sileye’s treatment were very high, Coumba’s father faced a difficult choice: child marriage was a traditional practice, but also against the law. Nevertheless, it was the only way he could imagine to immediately raise the needed money. How would the choices available to someone with overwhelming medical bills be different in the region or country where you live?

- In general, how do you think where you live affects how you live? What traits do you think the film's characters would have manifested in any circumstances, and how much was the result of their particular culture, environment, and location?
- In what ways do cultures “collide” in this film? Can any of what you observed be generalized, do you think? Explain.
- What factors can lead to changes in society—whether traditions, values, or practices? How does this film treat societal change?
- How is the situation of this village in Senegal similar to and different from other villages in Senegal? Other rural areas in sub-Saharan Africa? Other regions of Africa? The world? Does this film represent something larger than the experience of one village?
- How does an understanding of the history of Senegal shed light on aspects of the plot of this film?
- What can we learn about our own culture and beliefs by studying this film?
- To what extent do you think colonialism plays a role in the story that unfolds in *Tall as the Baobab Tree*? Explain why you think as you do.

### **Call to Action; Women’s Studies**

- Which issues relating to women are raised by this film? How does the film introduce them? How does it address them?
- Do you think it is fair to classify *Tall as the Baobab Tree* as an advocacy film? Why or why not?
- Why did a child marriage come about in the film? What do you think would have happened differently had Sileye not gotten hurt? Why do you think child marriage persists in other places today?
- Read these facts about child marriage from the organization [Girls Not Brides](#). Then discuss which of these aspects of child marriage were and were not addressed in the film.
  - Statistics: An estimated 10 million girls are married every year before they reach 18. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines anyone below the age of 18 to be a child.
  - Extent: Child marriage occurs around the world and happens across religious groups: 46% of girls under 18 are married in South Asia; 38% in sub-Saharan Africa; 21% in Latin America and the Caribbean; 18% in the Middle East and North Africa.
  - Health: Child brides face higher risk of death and injury due to early sexual activity and childbearing. Girls under 15 are five times more likely to die in childbirth than women in their 20s.
  - Education: Child brides usually drop out of school and are denied the opportunity to complete their education, significantly reducing their ability to earn an income.
  - Safety: Child brides are more likely to suffer domestic violence and sexual abuse.

- Child marriage is considered a serious human rights violation that denies girls their rights to consensual marriage, education, health, and the right to live in safety. Discuss the nature of rights. What is the difference between “rights” and “good things that people would like to have”? What is the relationship between rights on the one hand and duties/responsibilities on the other? Are consensual marriage, education, health, and safety all rights? Explain your reasoning.
- Coumba’s mother reveals a unique perspective on her own early marriage. Do you feel Coumba’s mother has a legitimate viewpoint? Do you think women should be able to make choices like abandoning their education and marrying prior to age 18 if they wish to? Explain your thoughts.
- Consider education in relation to citizenship. From the point of view of the duties of a citizen, should education be mandatory? What other reasons are there to promote education in a society in which it does not lead to better job performance and may even make people feel they are not suited for the work that has to be done to keep the family alive? What impact do you expect the education of its children to have on the village shown in the film?
- Suppose that Debo being married was never a consideration and Coumba’s attentions were, instead, focused on the plight of her brother. Discuss Sileye’s situation and prospects. What might Coumba have done for him? What might anyone else have done?
- Coumba had a facial tattoo. Debo did not. What does this mean to you? What explanation can you offer? Does it make you rethink any of your prior conclusions about characters in the film?
- How does Amady’s conversation with his friends point up the contrast between educated and uneducated young people in the village?

## **Digital Storytelling; Performing Arts; Film Studies**

- Most people who watch this film will use subtitles to understand the dialogue, since Pulaar is spoken by few. How do you think this impacted the production process? How do you think subtitles impact the way the film is viewed?
- Use the Glossary of Film Terms section to discuss the techniques the team used to tell this story. Offer rationales for the choices in terms of story-telling, plot structure, aesthetics, etc.
- Salieu Suso, the Kora musician who played for the film, was born into a family of traditional Gambian musicians/historians that extends back nearly 1000 years. How did the Kora music contribute to the movie? How would the movie have been different without it? How does knowing this about the musician affect your view?
- Visit the [film’s website](#) to access the movie soundtrack. Analyze its effectiveness as a stand-alone work of art. How does this compare to its meaning in relationship to the visual and other sound elements of the movie?
- Can the arts help influence social change? What, if any, social change do you believe *Tall as the Baobab Tree* is advocating?
- Compare and contrast the first shot in which Coumba and Debo appear together and the last shot in which they appear together. How does technique relate to meaning? How does blocking add to meaning?

- Compare and contrast all the shots in which a baobab tree is featured. How is film technique used to create meaning in these moments?
- Consider the very beginning of the film. What happens prior to seeing the sisters? Offer an explanation for the choices in terms of meaning.
- Consider the ending of the film. In terms of technique, how is it similar to the beginning? What meaning do you take from this choice?
- *Tall as the Baobab Tree* blends reality with fiction: the actors are all local villagers, and the story of the film is inspired by their lives and the experiences of their friends and family. In a narrative film based on true stories, where is the line between truth and fiction?
- *Tall as the Baobab Tree* is set in Senegal with a Senegalese cast, but it is directed by an American filmmaker. Read director Jeremy Teicher's [blog post](#) about some of the challenges and rewards that go along with cross-cultural filmmaking. Then watch this [behind the scenes video](#). Now answer these questions:
  - Many minority groups are concerned about appropriation and misrepresentation of their stories. How did the director's approach to this film help to avoid these issues?
  - How might the director's outside perspective have contributed to the telling of this story?
- If someone from far away were to watch a film about your neighborhood, what story would you want them to see? What reactions would you be concerned about? What misunderstandings do you think could occur?
- The director was 22 years old when he made this film, only a few years older than the students in the village. How do you think his age shaped his view?

## **Economics**

- If we simplify the plot to, "the future of one child in the family is sacrificed for another," could a similar story happen in your region or country? Explain how or why not.
- Compare the story of this family to what you know about other parts of the world in which children are treated, willingly or unwillingly, as commodities. How are the situations similar? How are they different?
- If affordable health care had been available to the family, what would have been different?
- Given what you understand of the family's situation, what other circumstances besides an injury could have led to child marriage?
- How do you understand the word poverty? Do you consider the villagers in the film to be living in poverty? Why or why not?
- How does economic necessity lead to a tight-knit family in this film? How does it divide the family?
- Are education and the economic model practiced by Coumba's family compatible? Explain your thoughts.

## **Education**

- How is the relationship(s) between education and societal change portrayed in the film?
- What do you believe is the value of education? How was education depicted in the film? Was its value—as you understand it—revealed? Which of the characters questioned the value of, demands of, or results of education? What did they say? Explain why they hold the points of view they do.
- How is the educational system in Senegal influenced by colonialism? What challenges, or benefits, do these influences bring?
- How do you believe education changes people? How did education change people in the film? How did it change their relationships with their homes and home life? Explain.
- What differences would you expect to find in a society with little or no formal education and a society with a high level of formal education? What differences would you expect to find in people with little or no formal education and people with a higher level of formal education? How does the film treat people with different levels of education? How does education impact thought and action in the film?
- The teacher is aligned with the law in his opinion of what Coumba should do. What do you make of this?
- Coumba's generation is the first in the village to go to school. How do you think the culture of the village will change as more students enter and complete the school system?
- Coumba and Amady lead lives that require them to move between two worlds: the modern city, where they live during the school year, and the traditional village, where they return to their families. How has this already impacted them? What further changes and challenges do you expect to occur?

## **Ethics/Civics**

- How is “good citizenship” an issue in this film? What makes a good citizen?
- What potential issues do you see in situations in which laws and traditions are at odds?
- When should an individual challenge his/her family’s or society’s beliefs?
- What are the responsibilities of the individual when it comes to social justice?
- How should we approach making choices between two equally ethically challenging options?
- What is the relationship of rights and responsibilities?

## Faith-Based Studies

- Among many major religions, there are sub-groups that carry on traditions that are not explicitly tied to tenets of faith. What elements can lead to these cultural differences?
- What faith is practiced by the household in the film? How can you tell? In what ways were their expressions of faith particular to their beliefs, and in what ways were they characteristic of any theistic religion?
- What are some reasons that tradition and faith might offer a different perspective on life from the perspective of those with a secular worldview? From the perspective of legislators? From the perspective of educators?
- In what ways are traditions and beliefs important in families and society today in your community? Which factors make honoring traditions and beliefs challenging?
- Faith and traditions can come into conflict with laws that do not acknowledge the validity of their view. This is true of child marriage in the film and of abortion, male and female circumcision, breastfeeding, and other issues, depending on country and region. Compare and contrast these issues and child marriage.

## Languages and Language Arts

- How does learning the stories of people in different circumstances from ourselves help us understand our own beliefs and behavior?
- Two languages—Pulaar and French—are spoken in the film. Identify when each is used and explain why. Compare to situations you have seen or know of in your region or country in which people speak different languages for different purposes.
- Most people who watch this film will use subtitles to understand the dialogue, since Pulaar is spoken by few. How do you think this affects the audience experience?
- If you know French, explain what you think the difference is between understanding the characters' dialogue in French and reading the subtitles.
- What is and has been the role of storytellers in societies through time?

## Activities

- Choose an issue that *Tall as the Baobab Tree* touches on. Design a poster to take a stand on the issue.
- Coumba refused to report her parents to the police as her teacher recommended, even though she knew that early child marriage is against Senegalese law. Imagine that Coumba had indeed gone to the police. Write a script and then record it for playback — or act out — the scene when the police go to the father and mother.
- Imagine Debo's life after her marriage. Write a collection of personal diary entries from Debo's point of view covering a period of time in your new life.

- Pretend you are a reporter for an international news service and write an article on the film as if it were a true story. Use facts about early child marriage to support your reporting.
- Create an image by drawing, painting, using computer graphics, or any other medium that captures what, to you, is the essence of *Tall as the Baobab Tree*.
- Write lyrics for a song about the plot of *Tall as the Baobab Tree*. Create music or team up with someone who can.
- Prepare a two-minute talk on what *Tall as the Baobab Tree* meant to you.
- Write a letter to the director, the director of photography, or the composers of *Tall as the Baobab Tree*, asking about or commenting on their work in the film. Or write a letter to one of the characters in the film! Submit your letter through the contact form on the film's website, [www.TallastheBaobabTree.com](http://www.TallastheBaobabTree.com).
- Go to the website of Girls Not Brides in the [Resources](#) section. Decide whether you can support their work. Write a short essay about the group and why you can, can't, will, or won't support them.
- Retell the story as a narrative. Then consider what is gained and what is lost by the "translation."
- Use the CIA World Factbook website to explore basic facts about Senegal (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sg.html>) Does what you learn augment your understanding of the movie? Explain why or why not, and if it does, how it does.
- View the stories behind the film in the Resources section. Write about your reactions. Which one impacted you the most?
- Read the [FAQ](#) about what inspired the young film director and what it was like to make his first movie in a language he did not speak. What questions would you like to ask?

## Resources for Further Investigation

**Watch:** *This Is Us* – the documentary that inspired *Tall as the Baobab Tree*.

Nominated for a Student Academy Award, *This Is Us* opens a window into daily life as a student in rural Senegal. Directed by Jeremy Teicher, *This Is Us* consists of selected short digital stories written, filmed, and narrated by a group of first-generation students from Sinthiou Mbadane, Senegal – the village where *Tall as the Baobab Tree* was filmed.

*This Is Us* is included in the *Tall as the Baobab Tree* educational DVD.

**View:** The [full gallery](#) of all the short digital stories that inspired *Tall as the Baobab Tree*. Under the guidance of the director Jeremy Teicher, the young village students wrote, filmed, and narrated stories about their daily lives, hopes and challenges.

The [Human Rights Video Featurette](#) on *Tall as the Baobab Tree*.

**Learn the Facts :** [Girls Not Brides](#) is a global partnership of 300+ civil society organizations committed to ending child marriage and enabling girls to fulfill their potential. Read about the impact of child marriage, the causes and the solutions.

**Read:** the FAQs on the [film website](#).

## Glossary of Film Terms

To gain a deep understanding of a work of art, it is important to understand how the medium is used to create meaning. This section will introduce you to some of the key techniques available to filmmakers by explaining some fundamental terminology. The terminology will provide a foundation for analyzing *Tall as the Baobab Tree*.

You will find that not all possible choices or combinations of choices are used in this film. Just as writers choose particular words (diction) and sentence constructions depending on their subject and purpose, so too does the director, cinematographer, and editor choose from among a wide array of possibilities to create the style of a particular film and to express its intended meaning.

**The Scene**—everything that is viewed through the camera, how that “everything” is arranged, and what actions it takes

Décor—the environment of the action, including outside (landscape; architecture), inside (furnishings) and in-scene lighting (called *motivated lighting*), such as candles, chandeliers, etc.

Lighting—motivated lighting plus lights added specifically for shooting (*unmotivated light*) as well as the level and color of light contribute to mood

Space—indicates relationships between and among subjects and objects stemming from affinity, cultural preferences, and context

Costumes—costumes not only reveal character, but hint at the time and place of the action, as well as the context

**Composing and Framing Shots**—by placing the camera into the scene and adjusting it (using level, angle, movement, and zoom) one determines what portion of the scene is shown in each shot, including whether a particular character’s point of view is being represented and how the relationships of elements of the scene are revealed, concealed, or highlighted. Composition refers to the relationship of the subjects shown within the frame and distance from the camera

**Shooting**— besides color, contrast, and focus this includes such things as:

Position—what is happening to the camera during the shot. There are three basic possibilities.

Stationary—generally mounted on a tripod for the duration of the shot, the camera can move up and down, swivel, and tilt.

Handheld—hand-held in the camera operator’s hand, the camera responds to the operator’s movement; attached to a camera stabilizer that the camera operator wears as a vest.

Moving—can be hand-held or mounted; movement may be provided by a vehicle, a dolly, etc.

**Height and Angle**—position and tilt of the camera in relation to what is in the shot

Eye Level—shot at eye level, giving the impression of the point of view of a subject

High-angle—shot from above, to show point of view or for other effects, such as to make the subject appear exposed to attack or weak; bird's-eye view, a type of high-level shot, may be used to provide greater perspective on the subject's situation

Low-angle—shot from below, possibly to show point of view or for other effects, such as to make the subject appear to be in a precarious position or a position of power or aloofness

Oblique-angle—shot with the camera rotated left or right from perpendicular, which can help to convey violent or confusing scenes; also called canted framing

**Movement**—includes rotating the camera on either its vertical or horizontal axis, as well as zooming; it can be used for following, connecting, or revealing out-of-frame elements.

Pan—side-to-side motion to either show the breadth of something or follow some action that is moving to the left or right of the camera or shows the spatial relationship between things.

Tilt—up-and-down motion to either show the height of something or follow some action that is moving towards a place above or below the camera level

Zoom—controlling the extent of what is being viewed by moving towards or away from the subject or object (or zooming the lens). Certain distances have standard names:

Long shot (LS)—shot showing full extent of object/person at close to the height of the frame, and includes some of the setting

Medium shot (MS)—shot showing about half of the object's height (a person from the waist up)

Close-up (CU)—shot showing only a single detail of the object (a person's face or hands only)

Extreme close-up (ECU)—shot closer than a close-up to reveal very small detail

Establishing Shot—a wide shot that reveals the setting, shows spatial relationships, and may help establish mood

**Editing**—the assembling of shots into sequences by juxtaposition, cutting, and the addition of transitions, addressing questions of rhythm and pacing

**Transitions**—the way shots are joined.

Cut—a shift from one shot to another; this may be smooth, with matching between the two shots, or not; a smash cut, for example, is the juxtaposition of two dramatically different shots with no transition, intended to shock the audience

Fade—image slowly goes to black

Dissolve—blend of two images as one fades and one gradually appears

Cut-in/Cut away—shifting from a long shot to a closer shot of material that was in the frame or vice versa

Intercutting or Crosscutting—alternating shots of two or more separate subjects/actions

Montage—series of rapidly shifting images, usually not accompanied by dialogue  
Reaction Shots—shot showing reaction to something, e.g., conversation or action

**Sound**—shares the distinction (but not the vocabulary) of lighting: diegetic sound comes from within the world of the film; sound originating outside that world is non-diegetic. Actors voices saying lines is perhaps the most common example of film sound. This sound can be turned into subtitles, thus, text.

**Sound Effects (SFX)**—additions to the natural sounds of the location, made to imitate subjects or objects in the film, whether seen or unseen (birds calling prior to the first image)

**Music**—can be diegetic (when Coumba and Debo sing at the opening), non- diegetic (the kora music), or a combination, helping to set mood, or reflect on the action

*Mary Elizabeth's Other Guides (published by Garlic Press):*

*The Hobbit: A Teaching Guide  
Redwall: A Teaching Guide  
The Odyssey: A Teaching Guide  
Lord of the Flies: A Teaching Guide  
The Giver: A Teaching Guide  
To Kill a Mockingbird: A Teaching Guide  
The Hunger Games: A Teaching Guide  
Catching Fire: A Teaching Guide  
Mockingjay: A Teaching Guide*

