

HIDDEN BATTLES

Post Screening Discussion Guide

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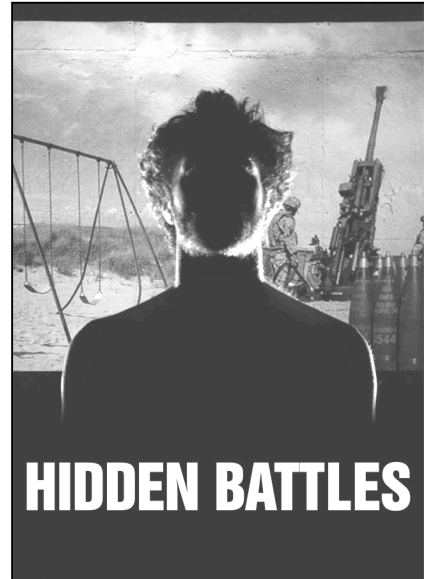
About *Hidden Battles*

Hidden Battles is a documentary offering an intimate look at how five men and women have dealt with having killed in war. While they all share the experience of having killed, each has a unique way of making sense of what they have done or their experiences and achieving personal understanding.

Because of the general taboo about discussing killing in war, and because few veterans speak openly about their deepest anguish and uncertainties, *Hidden Battles* might be the first time some viewers experience first-hand accounts of war trauma. The film reminds us that some seemingly ordinary people among us — housekeepers, artists, fire fighters — are still working through their experiences of killing in wartime.

Representing a cross section of nationalities, gender, class and race, these five former soldiers recall their states of mind at the time they killed, recount the anguish and confusion they felt afterward, and discuss moving on. Audiences witness interactions with family members, and hear their candid accounts of life after war.

Viewers will meet Zachariah, a leader of the Palestinian al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, Esmeralda, once a Sandinista soldier, Saar, a former Israeli Special Forces officer, Aaron, who was a Marine Corps sniper in Somalia, and George, who served as an infantryman in the Viet Nam War.



Director’s statement

Hidden Battles was born out my desire to understand what it is like to take a life in war. As a psychoanalyst, I have worked for years with people who were dealing with all kinds of trauma, but I wanted to better understand the soldier's experience. At that time — 2004 — it seemed important to find out more; our country was at war and we would soon have soldiers returning from combat who would be faced with integrating their war experiences into their daily lives. I traveled to different countries because I wanted to explore the similarities and difference in the soldiers’ experiences.



Director, Victoria Mills

Hidden Battles is a film that focuses on the personal stories of five soldiers. Most war documentaries have "experts" giving their opinions. In *Hidden Battles* the soldiers are the experts. By emphasizing the personal the audience has the opportunity to get to know these people more intimately—their motivations, conflicts,

strengths, and adaptations. We not only see a bigger picture of war, but we can witness the nuances of its impact on each of the five lives, creating for the viewer a different type of learning experience based on empathy and compassion.

This study guide will help facilitators create a discussion using the film. We hope that open dialogue will de-stigmatize talking about all facets of war. We will focus on each of the soldiers' stories to discover what it means to go to war and what happens once they have left the battlefield. Each soldier deals with their war experience in his or her own unique way. Ultimately their stories testify to the resilience of the human spirit and the hopefulness of their future.

Before the Screening

...YOUR AUDIENCE COULD INCLUDE WAR VETERANS, VETERANS' FAMILY MEMBERS, AND OTHERS WHO MIGHT FEEL VULNERABLE...

...

When introducing and showing the film and leading discussions afterward, please keep in mind that your audience could include war veterans, veterans' family members, and others who have undergone some traumatic experience, and who might still feel confused and vulnerable. A thoughtful introduction can help reduce the confusion and discomfort that some audience members might experience.

Your introduction should:

- State that the film is about people, not politics
- Acknowledge the emotional power of candid accounts
- Note that the five veterans are still processing their experiences
- Suggest that the film is meant to let us form our own reactions

Remind the viewers that there is no single best way to make sense of and move beyond participation in war or other traumatic experiences, and that they might think about and react to this film well after the evening is over.

You can also remind viewers that there are resources available for anyone in need of personal help after troubling experiences, and you might want to have flyers identifying local resources or reprinting sources mentioned on www.hiddenbattles.com.

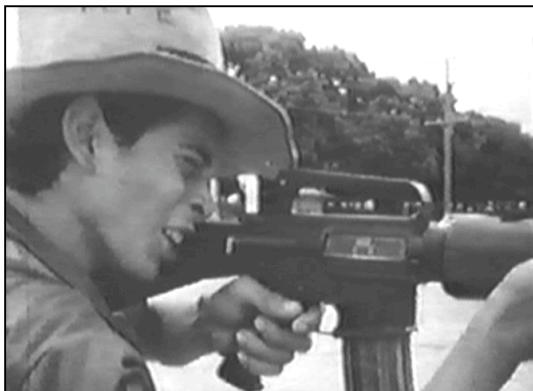
Leading the Discussion

After the film, allow a few quiet moments. People need a few moments to emerge from any powerful film.

Briefly remind them that individuals will have differing thoughts and feelings about the film as a whole and about the individual veterans.



~ YOUR OPENING QUESTION WILL PROBABLY DEPEND ~
UPON YOUR AUDIENCE AND PURPOSE.

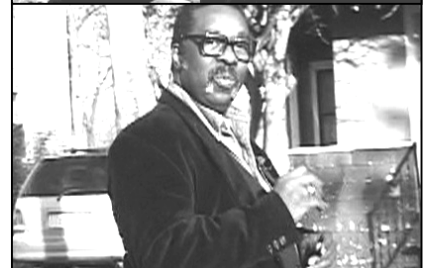


As always, audience discussions are best started by open-ended questions that are about people’s personal reactions, not a quiz on details of the film.

Once the audience starts talking and following one thread or another, the moderator should speak less, functioning mostly to call on the next speaker, encourage wide participation, rescue the discussion when necessary (from dominating voices, inappropriate remarks, or irrelevant tangents such as political opinion and prescriptive psychologizing), and call an end at the appropriate time on a positive note.

For the opening questions, you might ask:

- What did you feel as you watched *Hidden Battles*?
- Were you surprised or taken aback by anything?
- What were some of the different motivations for participating in killing?
- How did the soldiers’ experiences differ from their expectations?
- What was it like for these soldiers to remember?
- How did their memories change over time?
- How do they process their memories?
- What strengths do you see in these soldiers that help them deal with their experience?
- What do you think of how they found activities that helped them develop their understandings of their war experiences?
- Did you especially identify with anyone? Why?



Be alert to recurring themes

Depending on the audience, the discussion might concentrate on one large theme. Sometimes that can stall a discussion, with people either repeating themselves or continuing to argue one point. It is good to have alternate views articulated, but there is no need to decide which view is better than the others. You can suggest moving to a different topic if you think that would be more productive.

Ending the Discussion

End on time, suggesting, when practical, that individuals who want to can linger a few moments to talk with each other. Remind people of the availability of mental health resources, books, articles, additional films. Consider making copies of the attached resource list as a handout for people to take away. Reiterate the point that there is no one right way to understand and come to terms with traumatic experiences.

Resources

These resources can also be found on the *Hidden Battles* website at www.hiddenbattles.com/screenings/resources.

Veterans Resources

Hire a Hero

<http://www.hireahero.org/>

Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)

<http://iava.org/>

National Center for PTSD

<http://www.ptsd.va.gov/>

National Veteran's Foundation

<http://www.nvf.org/>

New Era Veterans

<http://www.neweraveterans.com/>

Operation First Response

<http://www.operationfirstresponse.org/>

Soldier's Heart

<http://www.soldiersheart.net/>

The Soldiers Project

<http://www.thesoldiersproject.org/>

US Vets

<http://www.usvetsinc.org/>

Veteran's Education Project

<http://vetsed.org/schools-2/>

Veteran's Quality of Life Access Network

<http://www.vqlan.org/>

“HIDDEN BATTLES” DISCUSSION GUIDE

Veterans Resources - continued

Veterans For Peace

<http://www.veteransforpeace.org/>

Vets 4 Vets

<http://www.vets4vets.us/>

Welcome Back Veterans

<http://web.welcomebackveterans.org/index>

Wounded Warrior Project

<http://www.woundedwarriorproject.org/>

Suggested Reading

A Terrible Love of War - James Hillman

A Time for Machetes: The Rwandan Genocide: The Killers

Speak - Jean Hatzfeld

Hell Healing and Resistance: Veterans Speak - Daniel Hallock

No More Heroes - Rick Gabriel

On Killing - Lt. Col. Dave Grossman

Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories - Ghassan Kanafani

Patriots: The Vietnam War Remembered by Both Sides - Christian G. Appy

Practicing Peace in Times of War - Pema Chodron

The Lonely Soldier: The Private War of Women Serving Iraq - Helen Benedict

Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua - George Black

War and the Soul - Ed Tick

War is a Force that Gives Us Meaning - Chris Hedges

War Talk - Arundhati Roy

Related Films

Arna's Children - director: Juliano Mer Khamis

Encounter Point - director: Ronit Avni

Leave No Soldier - director: Donna Bassin

Let There Be Light - director: John Houston

Lioness - director: Meg McLagan and Daria Sommers

Soldiers of Conscience - directors: Catherine Ryan and Gary Weimberg

The Good Soldier - directors: Lexy Lovell and Michael Uys