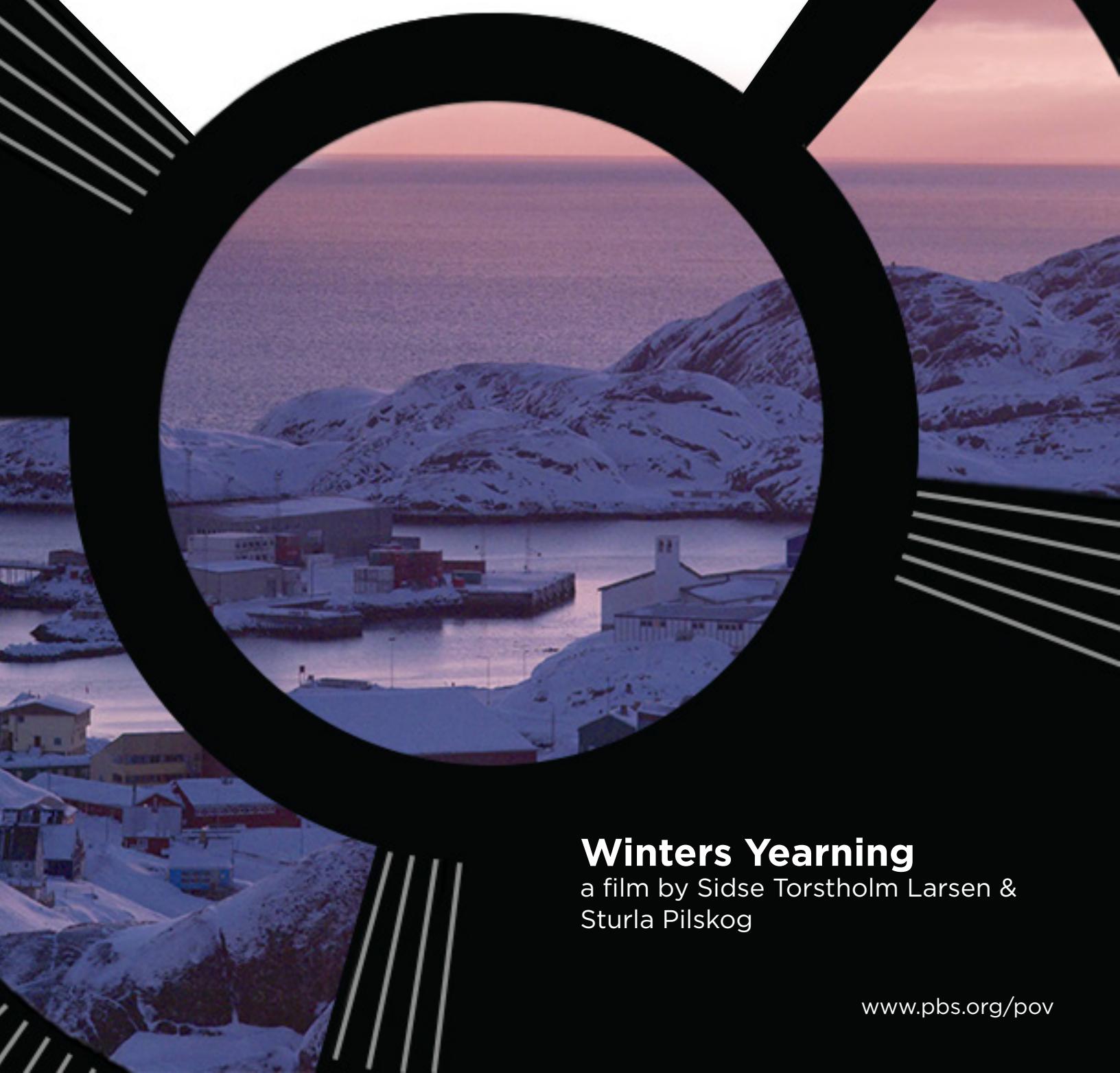


# POV

## Community Engagement & Education

### DISCUSSION GUIDE



#### **Winters Yearning**

a film by Sidse Torstholm Larsen & Sturla Pilskog



## WINTERS YEARNING

In Maniitsoq, Greenland, the US aluminum giant Alcoa Corporation has been planning to build a smelting plant for years. With the promise of economic renewal, *Winter's Yearning* follows the lives of the area's loyal aging population and its stymied youth. Pictured against immense, isolating landscapes, the people await their plant and with it, the nation's possible first step towards sovereignty.



## USING THIS GUIDE

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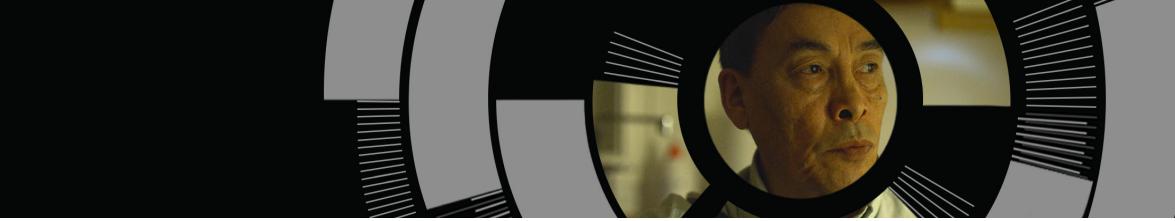
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This guide is an invitation to dialogue. It is based on a belief in the power of human connection and designed for people who want to use *Winter's Yearning* to engage family, friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people try to understand one another and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and listening actively.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the issues in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose one or two that best meet your needs and interests. And be sure to leave time to consider taking action. Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and optimistic, even in instances when conversations have been difficult.

For more detailed event planning and facilitation tips, visit <https://communitynetwork.amdoc.org/>.

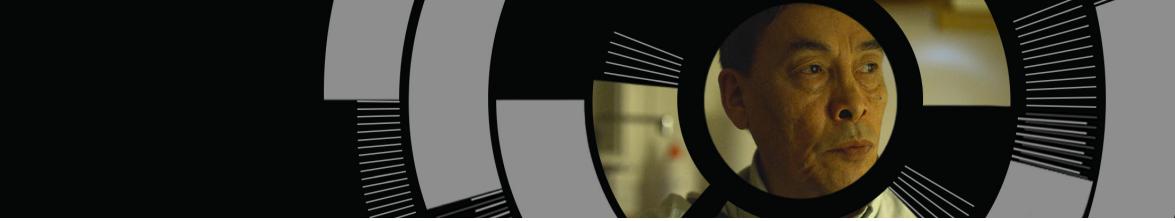
## LETTER FROM THE FILMMAKERS



When we traveled to Maniitsoq for the first time, it was to make a film about ALCOA's establishment of a giant aluminum smelting plant on the edge of the town. Thousands of foreign workers were supposed to arrive in the small town of only 2,500 inhabitants. As anthropologists, we felt it was a social experiment too significant to go undocumented. We wanted to tell the story of Greenland's biggest industrial adventure, as the locals would experience it. We expected the townspeople to be somewhat divided on the question of the plant and were honestly surprised to find that most of the town favored the project. Maniitsoq never got their plant. Perhaps they never will. But for many years, they waited for it to happen - and we waited, too. During this period of waiting, we got to know Maniitsoq and Maniitsoq got to know us. We fell in love with this tiny town, which has been overlooked politically and exists only in the shadows of Greenland's larger, more influential towns. But Maniitsoq has its own charm. Wherever we went and whoever we spoke to, we sensed that people here shared a great love for their hometown. But also, a yearning. They shared their lives with us with great generosity and hearts wide open.

They told us about their hopes and dreams, their joys and sorrows - what we experienced was strong and courageous people who were fighting for change and a better life. One thing was clear, in Maniitsoq nothing comes about without great effort. With time, we gradually came to a wider understanding of the underlying reasons for Maniitsoq's strong desire for the ALCOA project. As one elderly woman told us while we discussed industrial projects in Greenland: "People get sick from pollution, but people can also get sick from not having a job." That the aluminum plant has not materialized does not mean that it had no impact on Maniitsoq. The ALCOA project gave rise to a process of recognition and awareness and became the impetus to question even more critical topics like dependence and independence. Our film *Winter's Yearning* deals with these issues on the personal level, but also from the perspective of a society and a nation.

-- Sidse Torstholm Larsen and Sturla Pilskog, 2022



## PARTICIPANTS AND KEY ISSUES

### Participants

**Kirsten** who works at the local fish factory, is the teenager with whom we experience life in Maniitsoq as it is. She dreams about a life different from that of her parents and peers. She longs to be independent, but it's hard to break with her heavy social legacy.

**Peter Olsen** was the first Greenlander to obtain a master's degree from the University of Greenland. As the town's appointed aluminum coordinator, he has great plans and visions for Maniitsoq and his homeland. But as aluminum coordinator for a plant which does not exist, Peter ends up struggling with broken dreams.

**Gideon** is a therapist on a mission to heal his nation of the wounds and scars embedded deeply in its very soul. His own past has been anything but easy, but his philosophy is that everyone must stop waiting for salvation from without, and instead look in the mirror to overcome guilt and shame. Only then can one become independent, as an individual and as a nation.

### Key Issues

*Winter's Yearning* is an excellent tool for outreach and will be of special interest to people who want to explore the following topics:

- Indigenous rights
- Colonialism and its legacy
- Self determination
- Economic opportunity vs exploitation
- Independence vs interdependence
- Generational trauma
- Poverty
- Addiction and dependency
- Climate change
- Environmentalism



## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### KALAALLIT NUNAAT: LAND OF THE PEOPLE

Kalaallit Nunaat, also known as Greenland, is the world's largest island as well as its least densely populated country. The total population is about 56,000 with more than 88% of Greenlanders of Inuit descent. The official language, Kalaallisut or Greenlandic, is spoken by the majority of the population, and the country's name, *Kalaallit Nunaat*, translates as "land of the people." Despite its geographic location in North America and predominantly Inuit population, Kalaallit Nunaat remains a self-governing, autonomous country within the Kingdom of Denmark – a status which, along with the name Greenland, is among the lingering remnants of its long history of European colonization.

Kalaallit Nunaat is located between the Canadian Arctic Archipelago and Iceland with two-thirds of its land mass within the Arctic Circle. Three-quarters of the island is covered by the largest permanent ice sheet outside of Antarctica that stretches over 660,000 square miles and reaches over two miles deep in some areas. Evidence shows that climate change is shrinking the ice sheet, affecting the stability of Greenland's local environment and contributing to global sea-level rise.

The melting ice is also making a range of valuable natural resources from hydropower to uranium and oil deposits accessible for the first time. The unexpected economic opportunities made possible by the changing climate may offer Kalaallit Nunaat a path to long-awaited political and economic independence, but they come with unprecedented environmental and political challenges for this country and its people. According to a joint 2019 study by the University of Greenland and the University of Copenhagen, the climate crisis is having an adverse impact on the population's mental health and sense of social stability in a country already struggling with high rates of unemployment, substance abuse, and suicide.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### MIGRATION AND COLONIZATION

Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) has experienced waves of migration for more than 4500 years. The earliest known inhabitants were paleo-Inuit cultures including the Saqqaq and the Independence I & II and the Dorset which established communities between 2,500 BCE through 1,400 CE. The Thule culture, ancestors of the modern Inuit, migrated from modern-day Alaska and were established in Kalaallit Nunaat by the 13th Century.

It is believed the Dorset and later the Thule Inuit communities encountered the early Norse explorers beginning in the 10th century. Evidence shows that at the time the Norse established settlements on the southern coast of the island, naming the area Greenland, the climate was warmer and more suitable for farming. By the 15th century, however, the Norse settlements were abandoned, possibly due to changes in climate, prolonged drought, geographic isolation, and depleted resources.

Inuit communities continued to expand across Kalaallit Nunaat, but no further European attempts were made to colonize the island until 1721 when Danish missionary Hans Egede set out to contact the Norse community. Finding the settlements abandoned, Egede established a Lutheran mission and trading company near the present-day capital city, Nuuk, ushering in Kalaallit Nunaat's colonial era. In 1776, the Kingdom of Denmark declared a trade monopoly on the island's resources and closed the coast to foreign access for the next two centuries.



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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### HOME RULE, SELF GOVERNANCE, AND THE PATH TO INDEPENDENCE

Following World War II, Greenlanders increasingly pushed for greater autonomy and improved quality of life. Although the colonial status of Greenland was lifted in 1953, the era that followed introduced a series of reforms and policies aimed at more fully integrating the country into the Kingdom of Denmark and “modernizing” Inuit society. These reforms provided infrastructure and social services but also included programs that inflicted lasting damage on Kalaallit Nunaat society, including cultural suppression, increased urbanization, imported Danish labor, forced sterilization of Inuit women, removing children from their families to raise them under the “civilizing” influence of Danish foster parents, and resulting in Greenlanders losing cultural identity and language.

In 1979, the citizens of Greenland voted in favor of home rule. They became an “autonomous constituent country” of the Kingdom of Denmark gaining greater control over domestic affairs such as education, health, fisheries, and the environment while Denmark retained control of the legal system, foreign relations, and defense. Denmark also provided an annual economic subsidy to the country but retained partial rights to the island’s resources.

Over the following 30 years, the movement for greater independence grew, and in 2009 Greenlanders voted in favor of a self-governance referendum. They took control of the legal system, foreign relations, trade, and natural resource management and made Kalaallisut the official language. They also gained the right to declare full independence from Denmark. Despite an overwhelming majority of Greenlanders supporting full independence, that would mean losing Denmark’s support, including an annual economic grant which accounts for a third of the government’s budget.

Independence and self-determination would require Kalaallit Nunaat to establish new revenue streams beyond its dependence on fisheries. As climate change threatens the stability of fish stocks and Greenland’s ice sheet, it also provides new but environmentally and politically risky opportunities to access the wealth of valuable natural resources once buried under the ice. Resources that powerful countries and corporations are eager to tap and control.



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**BACKGROUND INFORMATION****MANIITSOQ: ONE TOWN'S STORY**

Maniitsoq is situated on an island off the Greenlandic west coast, approximately 93 miles from the capital Nuuk. The town has 2,582 inhabitants which make it Greenland's fifth largest town. Maniitsoq played a major role in Greenland during the 1980s and 1990s and was Greenland's most important fishing town. At that time, Maniitsoq was the place to be, and the population exceeded 3,200. But during the late 1990s, cod stocks collapsed, and the heart of the town, the fish factory, was forced to close. When the directors started filming, the unemployment rate was high, stores were closing, and population numbers were diminishing perceptibly. Today, as the cod stocks recover, Maniitsoq is also recovering, and the fish factory has re-opened. However, the unpredictability and vulnerability of the fishing industry necessitate identifying other possibilities for income in the future.

**THE ALCOA PROJECT**

In 2006, the American aluminum giant ALCOA signed an agreement with the home-rule government of Greenland to build an aluminum plant in Greenland. In 2008, Maniitsoq was chosen as the site due to its enormous potential for hydropower. The aluminum project would entail dramatic changes for the town, including a doubling of the population from all the foreign workers who would arrive for the plant's establishment; hence, Maniitsoq's appointment of an aluminum coordinator to plan the process and involve and inform all citizens. But due to the financial crisis, the price of aluminum fell 47 percent for the period 2008 – 2015, and ALCOA has postponed the project indefinitely. Today, ALCOA retains all rights to the precious hydropower.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS****STARTING THE CONVERSATION**

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion. Alternatively, you could ask participants to share their thoughts with a partner before starting a group discussion.



- What surprised you most when watching this film? What scenes stood out for you?
- What did you expect the film to be about? How did the film compare to your expectations?
- Why do you think the filmmakers wanted to tell this story?
- What did you know about Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) before watching this film? How did the film change (or reinforce) your perception of the country and its people?
- If you could, what question(s) would you ask Kirsten, Peter, or Gideon? What question(s) would you ask the filmmakers?
- Why do you think this film is called Winter's Yearning? What is the significance of "yearning" in the story?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS****“WHEN THE RAVEN TURNS WHITE”: WAITING FOR ALCOA**

“Tulukkat qaqortippata (When the ravens turn white)” is a common Greenlandic expression drawn from Inuit folklore that is used when a person is waiting for a much hoped for but unlikely outcome. How does this saying relate to the events of the film?

In the film, former Premier of Greenland, Kuupik V. Kleist, states, “We are in need for establishing other significant economic activities besides the fisheries.” Why is that? What factors make the country’s economic situation so precarious? How is climate change affecting the lives of the people? What impact is it having on livelihoods?

How did the people of Maniitsoq respond to the news of the ALCOA aluminum plant? Why was the ALCOA project so significant for the town and for the country?

About 150 citizens came to the public meeting about the ALCOA project. After which, one attendee said, “If our ancestors had been alive to see Maniitsoq today with its current poor industry, they would probably say: ‘Don’t think about the past. Rather, think about your future.’” What do you think he meant? What do you think he was talking about when he referred to “the past”? What perceived future benefits would this project bring?

What caused the ALCOA project to be delayed? The Maniitsoq mayor explains that ALCOA still has the option of establishing the plant in Maniitsoq and that the people of the town must exercise patience. What effect did the project’s delay have on the people of Maniitsoq? Peter wonders “What if the aluminum plant never happens? What will we do then?” What options do the people of Maniitsoq have? What would you do if your community was in this situation?

Peter explains that his role as the aluminum coordinator is “to keep the citizens updated. To inform them how far the project is coming along.” But over the seven years he’s had the position he’s only met with ALCOA twice. How does Peter feel about his role in this situation? How does it impact his relationship to his community?

When it becomes clear that the ALCOA project will likely never happen, how do Peter, Kirsten, and Gideon and the other residents of Maniitsoq react? How do you think your community would react in this situation?



## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### A SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY: INDEPENDENCE VS INTERDEPENDENCE

Kalaallit Nunaat is still dealing with the legacy of Danish colonialism and its aftermath. In what specific ways did the legacy of colonialism affect the lives of Kirsten, Peter, and Gideon?

The Act on Greenland Self-Government was granted in 2009 as well as the right to hold a vote for full independence from Denmark. In the film, a newspaper headline declares "Large Majority in Favor of Independence", but Peter says, "If we want to obtain independence, we must make sure that we can earn our own money. We must be able to produce and export so that we can be self-supporting. Just like our ancestors did. That's not how it is today." What factors contributed to the country's dependence on Denmark? What did Peter mean by, "just like our ancestors did"? What is different today from their ancestors' time?

Kirsten, a young woman who works in a fish processing factory, is hanging out with her girlfriends and they talk about pregnancy and their peers having children. How do these young women feel about pregnancy and parenthood? Why does Kirsten's mother encourage her to stop taking birth control pills? Why does Kirsten want to get an education first?

Gideon discusses the challenges of life in Maniitsoq with a young woman who had lived in the capital city Nuuk and was thinking about returning there for two years to study finance. How did she feel about life in Nuuk compared to Maniitsoq? Why is it significant that people who grow up in Maniitsoq are less fluent in Danish than people in Nuuk? What are the biggest challenges for young people from Maniitsoq?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Peter says, "There's been a lot of talk about independence but today, the reality is that most of the young people move to Denmark. That's the strange thing about it: We want independence, but people are fleeing the country." Why do young people move to Denmark? What impact does emigration have on the Maniitsoq community and the country?

In Gideon's workshop, one of the participants asks "Why do we Greenlanders have this tendency to look down on ourselves?" and Gideon responds, "I'm a Greenland too, and I don't feel like that!" How do you feel about this exchange? What does it suggest about the social and cultural dynamics at play in the country?

Gideon says, "When you consider dependence--whether it's waiting for the authorities or alcohol or gambling addiction-- it's the same mechanisms that are at work. The result is that you are put in a waiting position that creates frustration and, in the end, self-pity. I gladly admit these problems. Because we can only deal with them if we talk about them." What do you think about Gideon's perspective? Do you agree? How do you think this relates to the delayed Alcoa project? How does it apply to the country's relationship with Denmark? Why is the theme of "dependency" significant to the story the film is telling?

At the end of the film, Gideon explains, "My greatest dream for Greenland is...You might expect me to say independence. But it's just to see my fellow citizens having self-confidence and a spirit of community." Why do you think Gideon prioritizes self-confidence and a spirit of community as a precursor to independence? Gideon says, "If we get there, we have nothing to fear in the future." What are your thoughts about this? What lessons can we draw from this that apply to our own communities?

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS****MAKING USE OF EVERYTHING: GREENLAND'S PATH TO THE FUTURE**

One of the elder residents at the retirement home tells Kristen, "I have a lot of respect for Greenland. And it's a good thing that people have become more aware about the country. That is rewarding." Why is it significant for Kirsten to hear this from an elder member of the community? The resident also says, "We inherit the challenges of our ancestors." What does she mean by this? How does this relate to the themes of the film and the country's current situation?

Peter says, "History tells us that our ancestors were eminent at making use of everything. We should look at how they made use of the resources and go back to this way of thinking." How do Peter, Kirsten, and Gideon each demonstrate their ancestors' way of thinking in their own journeys?

Later, Gideon talks about his own alcoholism and the impact it had on his life. He says that he's grateful his wife divorced him because it forced him to look at his choices, "I stopped blaming others and sought help." How is seeking help, different from dependence? How did Gideon make use of his own experience to chart a different path for himself? How does community support and "interdependence" differ from the "dependence" model that exists between Kalaallit Nunaat and Denmark?

Early in the film, Kirsten longs to be rich enough to go to an Eminem concert, but later she talks about how her arrest and community service gave her a sense of purpose she never expected. She says, "Changes may come someday, but you don't know when . Being able to give something to those who need it. It's incredibly wonderful." How has Kirsten's outlook on the future shifted? What can we learn from Kirsten's journey?

In one counseling activity, Kirsten is asked to "map out" her plans for the future, detailing all of the resources, supports, and challenges connected to reaching her goals. Why is this process important for her? How does this benefit Kristin? How does this activity mirror the experiences Peter and Gideon have in the film?

At the end of the film, Peter shifts his focus from the ALCOA project to a new vision for Maniitsoq's future. He explains, "There are a lot of whales just outside Maniitsoq. We've begun to understand that we can use the whales for more than food. We hadn't thought about that before. So that's why we're now developing the idea that Maniitsoq must be the City of Whales." How are Gideon and the town making use of their experience with ALCOA to chart a new path for their collective future?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Peter and a friend talk about the collapse of the ALCOA project and lament that the country accepted the American company's project rather than a Norwegian company that also showed interest. Peter says the Americans are only interested in making money, "they don't have their hearts in it like the Norwegians." What does this exchange reveal about the community's attitude toward ALCOA and more broadly, the United States now that the project has been indefinitely delayed? The United States and U.S. companies have demonstrated increasing interest in Kalaallit Nunaat for its resources and strategic location. Europe and China are also eager to tap into the islands' wealth. How might the collapse of this project impact Kalaallit Nunaat's relationship with the U.S. and its future on the global stage?

Although Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) is two-thirds the size of the continental United States, the country's population, 56,000, is one-tenth the size of the least populous U.S. state, Wyoming. The island's expansive wealth of natural resources presents opportunities for the predominantly Inuit population but also serious risks. What are some of the unique challenges the people of Kalaallit Nunaat face? What opportunities do they have as they attempt to gain full economic and political independence?

### TAKING ACTION

If the group is having trouble generating their own ideas for next steps, these suggestions can help get things started:

Learn more about the history of Inuit communities in Kalaallit Nunaat (Greenland) and their cultural and political relationships with Indigenous communities in the United States, especially the Inuit in Alaska and Arctic territories. Have the group reach out to Indigenous rights movements on the local, national, and international level and learn more about their priorities and how to become allies.

Indigenous peoples are often viewed as victims of climate change, but for almost 20 years, Indigenous communities around the world have been sounding the alarm and leading the charge to combat pollution, global warming, and environmental damage. Learn about the important leadership role Indigenous communities are taking on this critical issue and connect with local Indigenous groups to lend support.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

In August 2019, then President Trump caused a stir when he confirmed the United States' interest in "buying Greenland" from Denmark. Greenland's foreign minister, Ane Lone Bagger, promptly responded: "We are open for business, but we're not for sale." Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen also responded, "Greenland is not Danish. Greenland belongs to Greenland." Although the president's suggestion was met with consternation, the fact is that the United States has a long and complicated history with Greenland and its people, including several attempts to "purchase" it outright. Have the group explore the historical relationship between the two countries and learn about how their local and national representatives view current policies and initiatives related to Kalaallit Nunaat.

### RESOURCES

#### **NUNATTA KATERSUGAASIVIA ALLAGAATEQARFIALU GREENLAND NATIONAL MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES**

<https://en.nka.gl/>

The official website for the national museum and archives provides online access to the museum's collections and exhibitions, as well as Greenland's intangible cultural heritage.

#### **INTERNATIONAL WORK GROUP FOR INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS: GREENLAND**

<https://www.iwgia.org/en/greenland/3633-iw-2020-kalaallit-nunaat.html>

A global human rights organization that promotes, protects, and defends indigenous communities by monitoring, documenting, and reporting on Indigenous peoples' status and efforts to protect their rights.

#### **CLIMATEGREENLAND**

<http://climategreenland.gl/en/>

The Government of Greenland's website about climate change in Greenland with information and resources related to the effect of climate change on the country and its people and current initiatives to address the environmental impact.

#### **ARCTIC COUNCIL**

<https://www.arctic-council.org/>

The Arctic Council is an intergovernmental forum promoting cooperation, coordination and interaction among the Arctic States, Arctic Indigenous peoples and other Arctic inhabitants on common Arctic issues, in particular on issues of sustainable development and environmental protection in the Arctic.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS****OCEANS NORTH**

<https://www.oceansnorth.org/en/about/our-story/>

A non-governmental organization that fosters science and community-based conservation in the Arctic and Atlantic regions of Canada, as well as western Greenland.

**UNITED NATIONS DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS: INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/>

The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) addresses Indigenous issues related to economic and social development, culture, the environment, education, health, and human rights.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

[https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP\\_E\\_web.pdf](https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf)

## CREDITS &amp; ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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**Thanks to all who reviewed this guide:**

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