



LIYANA – A STUDY GUIDE

A film produced and directed by Amanda Kopp and Aaron Kopp (2017)

LIYANA is an animated African tale born in the imaginations of five orphaned children in Swaziland, who collaborate to create the story of a Swazi girl named Liyana, who embarks on a dangerous quest to rescue her young twin brothers. Fictional Liyana's perseverance is drawn from the darkest memories and brightest dreams of the real-life Swazi orphans. Their fictional character's journey is narrated by the orphans, interwoven with observational documentary scenes of their lives, to create a genre-defying celebration of collective storytelling.

THE FILMMAKERS' GOALS



The **LIYANA** directors Aaron Kopp (who grew up in Swaziland) and Amanda Kopp, and their animator/ art director Shofela Coker, are among a new wave of filmmakers exploring the permeable genre-barrier between “fiction” and “non-fiction.” They state their goal as that of cultivating the culture of hope and pride in the Swazi nation, and across the southern African region. The filmmakers seek to inspire the next generation of southern African leaders to embrace their own strength and identities, to encourage young people to make their voices heard, and to unite communities. The hope is to use the power of storytelling to dispel misconceptions about vulnerable African populations, and to improve the confidence in their own potential to make the world a better place.

THE BACKDROP OF THIS STORY: SWAZILAND

Swaziland is a small, landlocked constitutional monarchy in southern Africa, known for its wilderness reserves and traditional Swazi culture. Swaziland is divided into four administrative districts: Hhohho (northwest), Lubombo (east), Manzini (central-west), and Shiselweni (south). In the north, Nsangwini prehistoric rock art paintings remain to date bushman culture there from c. 25,000 BC, where paintings of ochre and animal blood depict humans, animals, and the supernatural. Hunters are depicted floating on raised legs, embellished with feathered wings, and in one case, with the head of a mantis. Today rural villages rely upon subsistence farming and raising of livestock.

<https://wikitravel.org/en/Swaziland>

https://sacredsites.com/africa/swaziland/nsangwini_cave_paintings.html



Swaziland is also known for its spectacular nature reserves. Malolotja Nature Reserve covers hundreds of miles of scenic mountains with high cliffs and waterfalls, making it a prime highveld conservation area. The Lebombo Mountains on the northeastern border with Mozambique are a backdrop for Mlawula Nature Reserve, where more than 350 different species of birds can be found. Nearby Hlane Royal National Park is home to diverse wildlife including lions, hippos and elephants. Mlilwane is the most visited of Swazi parks, where zebra, giraffe, many different antelope, crocodile, hippo, and wildebeest can be seen.

<https://www.africaguide.com/country/swazi/parks.htm>

Though English is the official language of business and urban centers, Swazi (also known as SiSwati), a Southern Bantu language, is spoken almost exclusively in rural areas.

SOME SWAZI PHRASES

<i>Sawubona</i>	Hello
<i>Unjani</i>	How are you
<i>Ngiyaphila</i>	I am fine
<i>Ngiyabonga</i>	Thank you
<i>Wota lapha</i>	Come here
<i>Sala kahle</i>	Stay well
<i>Hamba kahle</i>	Go well

<http://www.sntc.org.sz/cultural/lifestyle.asp>

HIV/ AIDS IN SWAZILAND



Though one of the smallest countries in Africa, it is also a country with one of the world's worst AIDS crises, per capita. The total reported percentage of those with HIV is listed as 30% - 40%, though the data does not include those who have not yet been tested. The AIDS epidemic has broken up the traditional extended Swazi family unit, leaving many young children orphaned and fighting for survival. In addition, Swaziland's Tuberculosis (TB) incidence rate is the highest in the world, and 80% of the TB patients are co-infected with HIV.

<https://www.unicef.org/swaziland/children.html>

<https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/countries/swaziland/>

SWAZI ORPHANS



Roughly 100,000 children in Swaziland are orphans and grow up without their parents. 15,000 households in the country are headed by children who raise their younger brothers and sisters by themselves. The vast majority have lost their parents to AIDS. AIDS has created a vicious cycle by breaking down the institution of the family. Orphans often fall into poverty and hunger, drop out of school, and become vulnerable to violence, rape and abuse. Chronic malnutrition affects 40 per cent of children.

<https://www.unicef.org/swaziland/children.html>

<https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news>

THE GOOD NEWS



A 2017 survey found that 73.1% of the infected population now has fully suppressed the virus, and new HIV incidence has dropped by 44% by integrating of programs for preventing transmission of HIV; research and evaluation for innovation; addressing harmful gender norms; and health systems strengthening. UNICEF "Advocacy by Action" efforts and other social programs have also revolutionized public attitudes about HIV/AIDS, and the sexual abuse of children, by bringing the discussions out of the shadows and into counseling where progress can occur.



LIYANA THE MOVIE: CHOOSING HOW TO TELL THIS STORY



LIYANA is a mixed-genre movie, one that employs both animation and live-action throughout. The filmmakers first shot the live-action scenes, including the classroom creative process with storyteller Gcina Mhlophe, the footage in and around the orphanage, and the narrative by each of the orphans. Later the directors embarked upon making their world come alive, by finding an artist to help tell this story animated classic quest tale. According to directors Aaron Kopp and Amanda Kopp, *“We wanted to follow the story wherever it led, not beholden to any notion of genre. We didn’t set out to make any particular “kind” of film, we just wanted to tell a good story.”* To do this, they used many different tools.

WHAT IS A QUEST TALE?



A quest is a journey undergone by a protagonist (ultimately, the hero/ heroine of a story). Typically in a quest story, the protagonist is forced by circumstance to embark upon a journey, where they must face many obstacles, amid much peril, vanquishing evil or an enemy (internal or external), and ultimately return in the end changed by the experience with newfound wisdom from his/her quest. Think Meg in *A Wrinkle in Time*; Frodo in *The Lord of the Rings*; or Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

WHAT IS A DOCUMENTARY FILM?

Documentary is a broad term used to describe a non-fiction film that in some way "documents" or captures reality. Documentary film is a genre of movie making that uses video & film scenes, photographs, and sound of real people and events, which are then edited together to create a particular viewpoint, message, or experience. However, the documentary genre has evolved in recent years, making it a challenge to define. Only a portion of LIYANA is a documentary film; the rest is narrative 2D/ 3D animation.

<https://www.desktop-documentaries.com/what-is-a-documentary.html>

HOW IS 2D ANIMATION DIFFERENT THAN 3D ANIMATION?



2D animation focuses on creating characters, storyboards, and backgrounds in two-dimensional environments. Figures can move up and down, left and right, but do not appear to move toward or away from the viewer. 2D animators create frames to define a sequence that are then moved at varying speeds to create the illusion of motion. 3D or three-dimensional animation has more depth and is more realistic, which often involves physical sculpting and/or digital sculpting with specialized software. Both 2D and 3D animation is used

in LIYANA, with animation software such as 3ds Max, Maya, and Zbrush all employed at different stages of the production. 3D characters are integrated into 2D sets and backgrounds that look more lyrical and surreal in their execution, to achieve what the filmmakers call "breathing paintings."

<https://www.dbswebsite.com/blog/2010/01/29/what-is-the-difference-between-3d-and-2d-animation/>



All of this was realized by LIYANA's animator Shofela Coker, a Nigerian-born artist now based in the U.S., who created the look of Liyana's world – all of this led by the story told by the orphans. It is the kids' voices that bring Liyana's world into existence.

To view a short video of how just one shot in LIYANA was built by animator Shofela Coker, scroll down to the lower part of this article:

<https://www.moviemaker.com/archives/moviemaking/directing/how-they-did-it-liyana/>

AFTER THE FILM – DISCUSSION TOPICS:

- These orphans work collaboratively to create this story. What would it be like if your class tried to write a story together – how might your classmates approach it differently?
- Why do you think that this group of mostly-male students would choose a female protagonist for their quest story?
- Studio movies will often employ Hollywood actors to voice animated characters. How does the use of the orphan children as narrators change the way you view this movie?
- These students discuss the hardships of Liyana’s home life in a stoic matter-of-fact way. Why do you think that is true?
- The students become more passionate and lively when describing the dangers and adventures of the fictional story. Why do you think that is true?
- What role does the bull play in this story? Can you think of other characters in classic quest tales that serve a similar dramatic function?
- After leaving the bridge broken by the crocodiles, one of the boys voices the question of Liyana’s fear: “How will I go back home now?” Discuss why the boy would ask this at this point in Liyana’s story.
- Liyana takes a rest at the edge of the sea. What purpose does this sequence serve in the narrative?
- Liyana has a moral challenge in the middle of this story – can you say what that was?
- Liyana must be resourceful during her journey. What indications do you have of the resourcefulness in the orphans?
- At one point we see one of the orphans traveling to the clinic for an HIV test. What is the greater significance of this sequence in this story?
- The mangos could be seen as a symbol of hope in this story. What do these orphans have to say in their reflections about hope?
- What does this movie conclude about the meaning of family?

LIYANA



MoMA
DOC FORTNIGHT
2018
Official Selection



"MASTERFUL."
"A TESTAMENT TO THE
POWER OF STORY."
- Cinema



UK Film Review

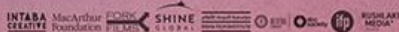
"GORGEOUS."
"UNLIKE ANY DOCUMENTARY
YOU'VE EVER SEEN BEFORE."
- Entertainment Weekly



Filmint

"LYRICAL"
"AS BRIGHT AND CAPTIVATING
AS IT IS POIGNANT."
- The Hollywood Reporter

LIYANA CREATING THE AFRICAN FUTURE "LIYANA" A FILM BY ABIGAIL KIPP AND ABANDIA KIPP PRODUCED BY ABANDIA KIPP
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: CHERYL L. CONNOR, PHILIP W. MILLER, PRODUCED BY ABIGAIL KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP, WRITTEN BY ABIGAIL KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP
CASTING: SCARLETT WELLS, COSTUME DESIGNER: ABIGAIL KIPP, MUSIC BY ABIGAIL KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP, EDITOR: ABIGAIL KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: ABANDIA KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP, PRODUCED BY ABANDIA KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP, WRITTEN BY ABIGAIL KIPP, ABANDIA KIPP
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