



## Senna

### Discussion Guide

Director: Asif Kapadia

Year: 2010

Time: 106 min

**You might know this director from:**

Uneternal City (2008)

## FILM SUMMARY

SENNÁ is an account of the vibrant life and sudden death of Formula One World Champion race car driver, Ayrton Senna. With unprecedented access to interviews with drivers and team members, plus behind-the scene industry disputes and candid moments of Senna himself, the screen is filled with an emotional portrait of this compassionate, spiritual, and driven Brazilian man. Director Asif Kapadia chose to ignore standard filmmaking techniques and, instead, chose to display Senna as he was, not as he is remembered.

From Ayrton Senna's first trip to Europe in 1978 to his fatal crash in 1994, SENNA delves into the psychology of a man driven to beat himself, over and over again. He was disheartened by the ugly misdoings in the Formula One industry, and found it imperative to give back to the country he came from. His belief in God drove him past the checkered flags of 161 competitive races, with 41 wins and 3 Formula One World Championship trophies.

Providing an uncanny view of one man's actual trials and successes, SENNA maneuvers a thrillingly sharp ride with a melancholic finish, thanks in part to the musical score from Brazilian composer Antônio Alves Pinto. For those unaware of the racing industry, the film provides a thorough introductory course, but it's equally intriguing for seasoned Formula One fans. Ultimately, this retrospective offers plenty for both the mind and heart to mull over long after the film ends.

## FILM THEMES

Ayrton Senna rose above the rest not only because of his superior driving skills but also because of the spirit he possessed. Unafraid of controversy, yet very concerned with the world around him, Senna campaigned for safer race conditions, gave back to the community, and blew the whistle on injustices and scandals brewing within the industry.

### PASSION VS. POLITICS

When Senna started racing go-karts as a kid, he was driven by the will to win, to beat his best, to be sucked into the speed of the track, the momentum of the race. The pure search for adrenaline propelled him forward. The further he delved into professional racing - with its politics of power, of who owns what, who has who, demands from sponsors, etc. - the more a dark veil of despair and anxiety clouded this sensitive and compassionate man. The louder the drone of money and power sounded in the industry, the more it interfered with Senna's passion, which was just simply racing. Many athletes follow their talent onto competitive fields without understanding that politics are often promoted over sport.

### HEALTHY COMPETITION?

Alain Prost was Senna's main rival throughout his career, and was also his teammate at McLaren. Sharing the winning platform time and time again, the struggle of working both together and against each other took an obvious toll. The competitive nature of their relationship grew venomous as they pushed one another off tracks, disputed wins, and made accusations to the press. The pressure to compete, to prove one's ability - to the team, to the public, and ultimately to oneself - corroded the pure joy that had put the wheels in motion in the first place.

### RAISE YOUR ROOTS

Senna's devout loyalty to his Brazilian homeland was ever apparent. When he was at the top of his game, Brazil was in a troubled state, with poverty and political corruption rife. Still, Senna never discarded his roots but displayed steadfast allegiance and pride. By raising the flag in victory and donating to his fellow citizens in need, he made himself utterly qualified for the national hero status attributed to him.

### STRONG SPIRITUALITY

"Nothing can separate me from the love of God." So reads the epitaph on Senna's grave. An unwavering belief in the Holy Spirit is featured throughout this champion's career. When he lacked the strength to complete a race on his own, such as in the 1988 Brazilian Grand Prix when his car was stuck in sixth gear, he called upon God. According to Senna, this iron-stiff spirituality carried him as far as he had come, and he never hesitated in praising and thanking God for the glories bestowed on him. His beliefs may have not made him invincible, but they did instill in him a strength of character and faith essential to winning.

**"Racing is my dream, my passion, my life."**

Ayrton Senna

**"There's only one word to describe Ayrton's style... fast. He would take the car beyond its design capabilities. He would brake later, fly into these corners where the car was just over the edge...he could dance and dance with that car to where it stayed on track."**

John Bisignano

## FURTHER DISCUSSIONS:

1. What were your impressions of Formula One before watching the film? Now that you have seen SENNA, do you feel any differently about Formula One as an industry?
2. Have you or anyone you know ever been involved in a competitive sport at a professional or semi-professional level? In your experience, did sport become mingled with politics?
3. Senna excelled in rainy conditions. Why do you think this was? What psychological impact did the weather have on him versus other drivers?
4. Senna was a very religious man who often referred to God. In your opinion, how does a strong spiritual belief help an individual succeed?
5. Fear is also a powerful motivating force. How does fear impact your performance in life? Does it drive you on or hold you back?
6. What do you believe is the biggest key to success?
7. Despite the fatal risks, drivers enter the racetrack and compete. What is their driving force? If the fear of death isn't enough to take people off the track, is there anything that could?
8. Do you believe that the presence of money detracts from the pure essence of enjoying something in life? Is it possible for people to simultaneously embrace the financial incentives and the joy?
9. Why do you suppose there so few female Formula One drivers?
10. Senna was revered as a national hero in Brazil. Do famous people have a responsibility to provide a good example to the community, to give back? Is it acceptable for successful people to revert into themselves?

## NOTES:

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## FILM FACTS:

- SENNA is the first film about Ayrton Senna to be granted the approval and support of his family as well as Formula One Management, which provided unprecedented images. Producer Gay-Rees and writer Pandey met with Ayrton Senna's family in March 2006 to show them a 40-minute presentation about what the documentary would include, entitled "The Life and Death of Ayrton Senna," which convinced the Senna family to authorize and support the project.
- British director Asif Kapadia knew little about the life of Ayrton Senna and Formula One in general when he was hired to direct the film. The producers chose him for this very fact, so that he would take a fair look at the material.
- SENNA set a UK box office record for a documentary, earning £375,000 (\$640,000) on its opening weekend.
- Formula One formally came into existence in 1946, when it was defined by the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) as the premier single-seater racing category in racing car sport worldwide. Races were also known as Formula A, and most cars came from Italy.
- F1 drivers need the highest degree of stamina and physical fitness to compete. F1 engines produce extreme heat, which puts a huge strain on drivers. During a race, a driver can lose up to 3kg (6.5 lbs.) of body weight through sweat. Drivers must train and follow a controlled diet.
- After WWII, several important changes took place in the international racing community. The Federation Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) set up its headquarters in Paris. During the 1949 season, it announced that it would combine several national Grands Prix to create Formula 1 with a World Championship for drivers. A point system was established and a set of rules and regulations were created to govern the races.
- Many Brazilian roads are named after Senna, including the main freeway from the airport to São Paulo, a tunnel along route to the heart of the city, and a major highway in Rio de Janeiro. The main road in Senna's Portuguese resort town Quinta do Lago was dedicated to him. A portion of the Interlagos circuit in São Paulo is named the "Senna Esses Chicane." In the English town of Reading, where Senna lived for a period of time, there's avenue named after him.
- Since Senna's death, every Williams F1 car has carried an 'S' somewhere on its livery.
- 5 female racing drivers have entered at least one Grand Prix, although only 2 ever qualified and started a race. In 1980, Desiré Wilson became the only woman to win an F1 race.
- Though no driver has died in an F1 race since Senna, 3 track marshals have died during a Grand Prix. At the Le Mans disaster of 1955, 83 spectators were killed and 120 injured, the greatest disaster in motor sporting history.

## WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Share this film. Give others the chance to be inspired by SENNA and learn from the story.
2. Consider donating to [Instituto Ayrton Senna](#), a charity Senna set up himself to provide quality public education for children in Brazil.
3. Go to [Grand Prix History](#) to learn much more about the history and formation of Formula One.
4. Learn more about how to make a career in Formula One. [Job in F1](#) offers advice and tips.
5. Encourage and practice healthy competition. There are numerous resources available to help teach you how you can get ahead and follow your passions without setting others back.

## We believe a good documentary is just the beginning...

In a world of sound-bites, documentaries provide an opportunity to think, understand, share, and connect with the world.

They are controversial, divisive, fascinating, unexpected, and surprising. They can be thrillers, dramas, comedies, romance, tear-jerkers, and horror films.

Documentaries provide the perfect topic for meaningful conversations. If you want to talk about the things that matter with people that matter then pick a film, invite your friends, and watch & discuss together. It's as easy as that.

**Influence Film Club – We are the conversation after the film.**