



56 Up Discussion Guide

Directors: Michael Apted, Paul Almond

Year: 2012

Time: 144 min

You might know Michael Apted from:

Bending the Light (2014)
Chasing Mavericks (2012)
The Power of the Game (2007)
Married in America (2003)
Me & Isaac Newton (1999)
The World is Not Enough (1999)
Moving the Mountain (1994)
Incident at Oglala (1992)
Gorillas in the Mist (1988)
Bring on the Night (1985)
Gorky Park (1983)
Coal Miner's Daughter (1980)
The Triple Echo (1972)

FILM SUMMARY

The Jesuit maxim: "Give me a child until he is seven, and I will give you the man" forms the premise for over 48 years of filming the British "Up Series." What began as a brief examination of social class in 1960's Britain became a mirror for the masses, an on-screen measurement of the aging process and all the steps a human life may encounter on the passage from youth to old age.

In 1964, Granada Television sent Michael Apted on a mission to locate a cross-section of British society in the form of 7-year-old children. From children's homes to pre-prep schools, 23-year-old Apted hand-picked participants. Through interviews and group footage, the program displayed the children on their own terms, delving into their perspective on the society in which they lived through close-up interviews.

The program was due to end there. Intrigued by the idea of catching up with the children seven years down the line, Apted's "Seven Up!" series took shape. By reinvestigating their lives every seven years, the series took on a life of its own, revealing issues far beyond the original "social class in Britain is still firmly in place" premise. Marriage, divorce, children, education, work, health, victories, losses - common human threads took center stage as 10 of the original 14 participants hung on all the way to 2012, when they reached the age of 56.

Apted intends to continue on every seven years, as long as he is "over ground." Although some of the participants dropped out and others have rejoined after a few episodes' break, all state their devotion to the cause. The tabloid press may cast vicious allegations along the way and living in the public eye may present its difficulties, but the fascination of watching real people make their way through the murky, fantastic waters of life in front of the camera's eye offers an unparalleled perspective on the universal experience of existence.

FILM THEMES

EXPECTATION ACCORDING TO UPBRINGING

At the ripe age of 7, the “Seven Up!” children were full of hope and dreams, their sights set on the outer spheres of possibility. Or were they? Pre-programmed from the get-go, by an early age the children had learned to expect what they had been shown to expect. While one upper-class boy aspired to be a lawyer another working-class girl dreamed of working as a shop assistant. From an impressionable age, certain life-defining standards seem to set themselves within us, paving the way for the future. As a highly influential motivating factor, social class – which defines where and how a person is raised – seems to carry a great deal of credence throughout a human life.

WHAT CHANGES, WHAT STAYS THE SAME

If time is a linear quantity, it is a kaleidoscopic one, adorned by the variegated stages of life and the ways in which the psyche adjusts. Ideas, desires, expectations, and hopes adjust throughout the course of a human life. As time passes, the concept of reality becomes more fixed, and the more an individual faces personal trials, the more former beliefs are likely to be placed in the past. Ambitions and hopes change as time keeps on ticking and the list of battles fought increases. And yet certain things remain constant in a human being. While the world is moving and thoughts are shifting, everyone has a core center that nothing – not even the tough tick of time – can touch.

LIFE’S MEASURING DEVICE

Family is everything. Now, the definition of family is not a fixed concept carved out in concrete letters. Relationships, whatever shape they take, shine through as the measure of a happy, fulfilling life to all 56 UP participants. Professional successes, financial gains, possessions accrued – all were mentioned. But nothing was granted as much credence, focus, and talk time as interpersonal exchanges. Births, deaths, marriages, divorces. The fulfilling force, the source of despair and elation, is in the partnerships we take on, those we lose and those of which we dream.

MAKING THE PRIVATE PUBLIC

From the beginnings of 56 UP back in 1964 to the present day, televised entertainment has been a mainstay in Western society. Sometimes noted as being an early form of reality television, 56 UP had a major impact on participants’ lives. What is it like to reveal your thoughts, your confusions, your victories and defeats, to a nameless public? Offering only brief snippets of each person’s life every seven years cannot approximate a true picture of a life, and yet the tabloid press contorted the facts with malice. Because of this, all participants expressed dismay at being involved in the program, being so ruthlessly exposed. Yet nearly all remained devoted to seeing the program through to its natural end.

“I don’t think life is there to be regretted. Life is there to be lived.”

Peter Davies

“No formal education can prepare anybody for life. Only life can prepare you for what comes.”

Neil Hughes

“Everyone needs to have a feeling that they belong somewhere, that there’s a plot of land they hail from.”

Andrew Brackfield

FILM FACTS:

- The first episode of the “Up Series” was filmed in 1964 as part of British Granada Television’s investigative current affairs series “World In Action.” At the time, 23-year-old Director Michael Apted was working as a researcher for the program, the first film he was involved with in his career, and his role was to find participants for the show from southern England. “Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man,” a Jesuit motto, served as the original premise of the film.
- 7 Up was not originally intended to be a repeat series, just a look at 14 children from across the U.K. representing varying socio-economic backgrounds. Apted chose to continue with filming, revisiting participants every seven years. All interviews are voluntary, and participants are each paid an undisclosed sum.
- Director Michael Apted was born in southern England in 1941, and studied law and history at Cambridge University. In 1980, he moved to the U.S. to continue his filmmaking career. He has directed a number of award-winning feature films and documentaries, including “Coal Miner’s Daughter,” “Gorky Park,” “Gorillas in the Mist,” and “The World is Not Enough.”
- A 2007 “The Simpsons” episode “Springfield Up” is based around the “Up Series.”
- 56 UP won The Peabody Award in 2012, and was nominated for a Chlotrudis Award in 2014.
- Between 1964 and 2012, the period between the first episode of the “Up Series” and 56 UP, the U.K. population increased from 54 to 64 million.
- Based on population, the U.K. is the third-largest nation in the E.U. and the 22nd-largest in the world, with one of the highest population densities globally. Approximately 30% of the population lives in southeast England, in or around London. In 2013, 47% of children were born to unmarried mothers, and 87% of the population was White British, as well as 7% Asian and 3% Black. The overall literacy rate is 99%.
- In 2013 the BBC conducted The Great British Class Survey, using economic, social, and cultural indicators rather than occupation, wealth, and education to define the current British class system. The bottom class, making up 15% of the population, is the precariat, earning little money and highly unlikely to go on to higher education. Next are the emergent social workers, the youngest group with a high number of ethnic minorities. Then come the traditional working class, 14% of the population, who are on average 66 years of age, followed by the new affluent workers and established middle class. At the top is the elite, 6% of the population, who have extensive social contacts, are educated at the leading institutions, and have plentiful savings.
- Harold Wilson was British PM in 1964.
- David Cameron was British PM in 2012.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. Take control of your life by fulfilling your dreams now, not at some future point. One’s life perspective and attitude has a lot more influence on the shape of quality of life lived than most other things.
2. Do what you can for those who are not fortunate enough to have a family. [The International Foster Care Organisation](#) – a global, not-for-profit – supports and promotes family-based foster care. Find out more to support their mission.
3. Connect with [The Open Society Foundation’s Education Support Program](#) on Facebook or Twitter, the organization works to promote equal education on an international scale. Equal education is key to an open society.
4. Focus on the personal relationships in your life, nurturing them and allocating them time and respect. Money matters, but relationships are even more fundamental to a happy life.

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.