



A Lego® Brickumentary Discussion Guide

Directors: Kief Davidson, Daniel Junge

Year: 2014

Time: 93 min

You might know these directors from:

Kief Davidson:

Open Heart (2013)

Kassim the Dream (2008)

The Devil's Miner (2005)

Daniel Junge:

Being Evel (2015)

Fight Church (2014)

They Killed Sister Dorothy (2008)

Iron Ladies of Liberia (2007)

Chiefs (2002)

FILM SUMMARY

What inspired two social justice filmmakers to make a documentary about a bunch of toy bricks? Lego pieces are a plastic pastime, nothing more than something intended to keep kids occupied and provide unavoidable “ouch” moments for parents catching them underfoot. What’s all the fuss about?

The fuss is that Lego is so much more than what meets the eye, and A LEGO BRICKUMENTARY celebrates the many-faceted uses, meanings, and purposes intrinsic in this familiar brand. As co-directors Davidson and Junge travel the planet to collect evidence of Lego’s global reach and witness the immense place it occupies in our collective imagination, we are reminded of the innate human impulse to build, create, and express ourselves.

In tune with the playfulness of the Lego brand, the film adapts an all-ages stance to storytelling, with a Minifigure leading us along the toy giant’s trail. With a brief look at the brand’s physical journey—from its humble beginnings in small-town Denmark to its present-day global empire status—the film offers both fact and fantasy, from a reflection on the near downfall of Lego in the early 2000s to highlighting a portion of the huge Adult Fans of Lego (AFOL) fan base of this highly beloved brand.

By documenting the many uses and users of Lego across the globe, A LEGO DOCUMENTARY asks: what is it about this simple toy that makes so much sense to so many, regardless of the factors that divide us? In the words of David Pagano, “Lego started as a toy, but now it’s definitely a way that people are expressing themselves... It’s also a tool and a means to an end, a means to tell stories.” The motivation behind the massive reach and prowess of Lego, therefore, is simple: Give the people a chance to express themselves without pressure, and they will do just that.

FILM THEMES

Lego is legendary, crossing boundaries of all types, appealing to a global community, and tapping into a basic human instinct. The key to its success has pushed the brand to stay young at heart and open in mind.

A GLOBAL BRAND, A UNIVERSAL JOY

At its core, the Lego brick is playful, possesses no prejudice, and carries no cultural identity. In this sense, Lego is a common shared culture, a language we all can communicate in, regardless of age, gender, location, class, or race. The words by Lego executive Tormod Askildsen, “As a language, it’s more global than English and Windows,” is anything but an overstatement. Lego reaches across the planet, touching something so undeniably innate in all of us. “For me it’s a hopeful thing to see that we share this common culture,” states artist Jan Vormann. By building itself on principles of joy and playfulness, Lego taps into our shared humanity and keeps us connected to simplicity.

STORYTELLING

Our lives are constructed of stories, histories from the past, tales of who we are, and dreams of where we’re heading. Lego bricks enable ideas, concepts, and invisible notions to be translated into the physical space. They provide a language for the non-verbal, a platform for the fantastical, and make the imagination a concrete, justifiable entity. There is an obvious attraction to the brick for children, who are still grappling with the linguistic devices and social norms of the adult world. But the potential of Lego has proven itself beyond childhood, as adults struggle to express their inner thoughts and tell their contemporary tales. Lego provides a physical context for the essential unspoken in all of us, building the bridges to the storyland of our lives.

AN OPEN WORLD

Many brands pride themselves on secrecy, withholding products from the public until they are finalized. With so much pressure and anticipation resting on secrets, a brand like this is only as powerful as its internal staff. Yet, with information now so open and accessible, a new model of supply and demand is developing. The Lego story provides a perfect metaphor for our changing world. As its continued secrecy nearly led to its downfall in the early 2000s, Lego chose to open its creative doors to the public and ushered in an era of crowd creation, fostering new energy by being receptive to outside input and thus furthering its success.

TOY AND TOOL

As the film explains, Lego creates more than simple toys. With endless applications in a wide variety of industries and fields, Lego helps city planners, filmmakers, therapists, mathematicians, sports stars, and writers. To build, to construct, to create—these are all human impulses, and Lego provides a tool with enough intrinsic structure to allow for individual creativity. We have expressed our evolution throughout time in the buildings we construct, with our needs providing structured demands for the creative mind. Lego provides an adaptable yet fixed tool for the human mind to prove its own ability to dream and deliver.

“One of the fundamental ways we know about humans and our history is by the things they built. Maybe little plastic bricks are a modern adaptation of that, but really it’s about creating something.”

Alice Flinch

“Story provides context for what you’re doing. It gives you - and especially kids - a meaning. It helps to unlock their imagination in new ways.”

Philip J. McCormick

FILM FACTS:

- A LEGO BRICKUMENTARY had its world premiere at the 2014 Tribeca Film Festival, where it was nominated for the Audience Award.
- Co-director Daniel Junge was initially approached by producer Jim Packer to make a film on Brick World in Chicago, one of the Lego conventions featured in the film. Junge decided that rather than telling a limited story, he would broaden the narrative to include the wider Lego community. The film crew shot in a total of 12 countries, and the only shoot both directors were on together was the first. They then went off and completed the rest of the film on their own in order to cover as much ground as possible.
- The film is narrated by Jason Bateman, best known for his role in “Arrested Development.”
- A LEGO DOCUMENTARY was privately funded. Although Lego approved of the making of the film, they did not finance it in any way.
- Lego Minifigures were originally made in yellow plastic and were face- and gender-less. Although they have since been granted faces and gender, the company has purposely retained the yellow hue, as they feel it is the most racially neutral color. Lego only assigns a skin tone to a Minifigure if it is based on an existing person, with the first diverse skin tones featuring NBA figures. Also, all Minifigure heads have holes on either side to allow air to pass through them in case a child were to swallow one.
- Billund, Denmark, the site of the Lego Group headquarters, had a 2014 population of 6,194. The original Legoland, which opened in 1968 and still hosts visitors from around the world, is located next to the original Lego factory. The Billund airport was built in 1964 by the Lego Group and is the second largest airport in Denmark. In 1948 Lego had 50 employees, all located in Billund. As of 2015 the Lego Group employed 13,794 individuals worldwide.
- Director Junge’s favorite Lego set when he was younger was #565 Moon Landing.
- The word Lego comes from the Danish “leg godt” meaning “play well.”
- Director Davidson first worked as a music video editor and went on to edit documentaries, which sparked his interest in the genre and inspired him to start making his own. He was nominated for an Oscar in 2013 for the short doc “Open Heart.” Both directors have previously made human rights and social justice films, and in the words of Junge, “This is our first populist film that could really break out to a mainstream audience.”
- Since the first Lego brick was manufactured in 1949, the ever-popular brand has gone on to produce over 600 billion parts, and in 2015 replaced Ferrari as the world’s most powerful brand, according to Brand Finance. As of 2016 there were six official Legolands, with five more to open over the next three years.

WAYS TO INFLUENCE

1. **Share** A LEGO BRICKUMENTARY with both the young and old in your life, and experience how the global phenomenon that is the plastic brick inspires creativity in us all.
2. **Activate** your own inner child by sitting down with a pile of loose Lego or a specific Lego kit, and allow your creativity to flow. Not only is building with Lego fun but also a proven way of relieving stress.
3. **Learn** about Lego’s ambitions to make a [positive impact](#), as well as learning about the [Lego Foundation](#), who “believe that sustainable change happens when you transform attitudes and behaviours across society.”
4. **Watch** one of the countless films featuring Lego, including “The Lego Movie” for an official take on the potential of the brick, as well of one of the very many films made by Lego lovers. If there’s a subject you love, it’s most likely been translated into Lego.

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.