Negeri 5 Menara
(The Land of Five Towers)

Affandi Abdul Rachman, 2012, Indonesia, 119 mins
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About this resource

This resource has been written by ACMI educator Susan Bye to accompany the Indonesian Film Festival 2016 education screening of Negeri 5 Menara. The resource offers teachers ideas for exploring the cultural aspects of the film as well as for analysing the film in the classroom.
NEGERI 5 MENARA (THE LAND OF FIVE TOWERS)

Affandi Abdul Rachman, 2012, Indonesia, 119 mins

Alif has never set foot outside of West Sumatra. He spends his childhood searching for fallen durian fruit in the jungle, playing soccer on rice paddies, and swimming in the blue waters of Lake Maninjau. His mother insists he attends a pesantren, an Islamic boarding school, while he dreams of attending public high school in Bandung.

As Alif progresses through school he begins to understand the sacrifices made by his parents to pay for his tuition. The school’s Arabic phrase “man jadda wajada” meaning “he who gives his all shall succeed” becomes the phrase Alif lives his life by.

Based on the best-selling novel The Land of Five Towers by Ahmad Fuadi and inspired by a true story.

Before Visiting ACMI
Some Background

Negeri 5 Menara begins in West Sumatra, but most of the story takes place in a boarding school in Ponorogo, East Java.

• Locate both of these regions on a map of Indonesia.

• Find out more about each region and describe:
  o landscape
  o culture
  o landmarks and important sites
  o industries

• What other interesting information did you discover?

• What are some of the well-known landmarks in each region?

Negeri 5 Menara by Ahmad Fuadi

• Find out more about the novel that has inspired this film and about its author.

• Begin with this article: “Ahmad Fuadi, journeys from under the volcano”, The Jakarta Post, 13 October 2011,

- What event in Fuadi’s life inspired the story *Negeri 5 Menara*?
- What kind of school is a pesantren?
- What kind of education did Fuadi have at this school?

*Negeri 5 Menara* was Fuadi’s first novel and achieved record-breaking sales.

- Why are so many popular novels adapted into films?
- What are some of the challenges of adapting a story that is both well-known and well-loved? (Students can think about adaptations of popular novels such as *The Harry Potter* and *The Hunger Games* series in their discussion.)

**Film Language**

What is the English term for each of the following filmmaking roles?

Sutradara ______________________________________

Ide cerita ______________________________________

Penata artistic____________________________________

Penata kostum____________________________________

Penata music____________________________________

Penata gambar____________________________________

Penata rias____________________________________

Penyunting gambar____________________________________

Produser____________________________________

Produser eksekutif____________________________________

Penulis scenario____________________________________
After watching the film
Response

- As a class share and compare your immediate responses to the film – single-word answers are an effective and unintimidating way of starting discussion.

- Extend these responses.

- In pairs, identify the main themes of the film. Share these with the class as a whole.

- In pairs, discuss the message of the film. With your partner, write a single sentence that communicates the message. Share your ideas as a class.

Setting: The Importance of Place

- Describe the area/location in West Sumatra where the film begins. What stands out? Compare this area to the Ponorogo region in East Java where the main part of the film story is set.

- What kind of life does Alif have in his hometown?

- How does his life change when he arrives at Pondok Madani?

- What are some of the ways this change is communicated?

- Why did the director include the bus journey from Alif’s hometown to his new school? What is being communicated to the audience in this sequence?

The School

The film was shot in the actual school that inspired Ahmad Fuadi’s novel. This was the first time the school had allowed a film crew to shoot there.

- What does this real-life location add to the film? Do you think it makes the story seem more realistic?

- Describe life at Pondok Madani. Imagine you are describing the school to someone who hasn’t seen the film.
  - What do the students wear?
  - What activities do they engage in?
  - What are the students like?
  - Describe the teachers and their teaching style.
Friendship

Alif makes some great friends at school, each of whom comes from a different part of Indonesia. Baso comes from Gowa, Atang from Bandung, Raja from Medan, Said from Surabaya, and Dulmajid from Madura.

- Locate each of these areas on a map of Indonesia. What are some of the similarities and differences between these places?
- Describe each boy’s hopes and dreams and what they tell us about them.

The boys’ friendship is based on the philosophy of Man Jadda Wajada.

- What does this mean?
- How is it introduced in the film?
- How does it influence the boys, their friendship and the way they live their lives?
- How have the friendships you have made at school influenced your life so far?
- In groups, explore this philosophy and how it might relate to your own lives. What can be achieved by following this philosophy and what are the challenges?

The Story

Compare the opening and closing scenes.

- What does the opening scene prepare us for the story that will take place throughout the rest of the film?
- The closing scene of a film not only brings the story to its conclusion, but encourages viewers to think about all the things they have learned.
- Join together in groups and think about what has changed – not only in the lives of the characters but in our own understanding as an audience.
- What is the message of the story and how does the ending communicate that?
- Discuss your responses to the film’s ending. Explain and give reasons.

The protagonist/main character

Alif’s story is based on the experiences of Ahmad Fuadi, who wrote the novel on which the film is based.

- What difference does this personal perspective make to the depiction of the character in the film?
• Do you agree that “Alif’s worst enemy is himself”? Explain your answer.

• How does Alif’s friendship with the other boys change him?

Many stories feature a main character who learns more about himself as he grows to meet the challenges that life throws up. This kind of story might be described as a ‘coming of age’ story.

• How does Alif ‘come of age’?

• Use the Character worksheet at the back of this resource to track the development of Alif’s character.

• Focus on a character that you found particularly interesting and use the Character worksheet to organise your response. (This exercise would be particularly valuable if each of the main characters could be considered by various members of the class.)

• Join together as a class to discuss and extend your ideas.

Audience

• Who do you think is the target audience for this film? How successful is the film in reaching and responding to this audience?

• Would you recommend this film to a friend? Why or why not?

• How would you describe this film to a friend?

• Design a film poster that captures the key features of this film for a potential audience. Write a catch-phrase that can be used on the poster to communicate the key idea or theme explored in the film.
Explore Further

Director

- Find out more about Affandi Abdul Rahman, the director of *Negeri 5 Menara*. You might like to begin with this article in the *Jakarta Post*:

Author

- Ahmad Fuadi is very well-loved Indonesian novelist. Find out more about him and his work.

Cinematography

In a feature film, what you see is as important as the dialogue. The camera communicates essential knowledge about the characters, the story and their world. For instance, when we are first introduced to Alif at the beginning of the film, we see a number of wide shots that include lots of sky to communicate the freedom and beauty of his life at home with his family.

There are many online resources you can refer to when exploring the way that the camera creates meaning in a film. This one from The Australian Children’s Television Foundation is clear and easy to follow:

Watch the trailer to explore and think more about the film techniques, shots and visual language used to tell the story: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MIMZqxf-YWE

- In groups or pairs, list the techniques you can identify in the trailer, consider their effect and explain how each of these techniques adds to the story.

Mise en Scène

The term mise en scène refers to everything you can see in a film. To explore mise en scène, you can freeze-frame a film at any point and consider: décor, setting, lighting, costume, acting, props, make-up, the use of space and positioning (of characters and objects).

- Choose two contrasting scenes (perhaps one set inside the school and another in an outdoor setting). Identify the different elements of mise en scène and explain how these visual features communicate information about the story.

Sound and Music

- When is music used in the film and what is its effect/impact?
- How is sound used to add to our sense of place?
Reflect

• What you have learned from viewing and studying *Negeri 5 Menara*?

• What did you enjoy most about the film?

• What was something you learnt from watching the film that you didn’t know about before?

• What did you discover about Indonesia or Indonesian life that you did not know?

• What do you want to find out more about?
# Character Worksheet

Name of Character: ________________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BEGINNING</th>
<th>END</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What do you know about this character at the beginning of the film?</td>
<td>What more do you know about the character at the end of the film?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Provide an example that explains what the character is like in the beginning. | Has this character changed by the end of the film? Explain your answer. |