



STUDY GUIDE

The prospect of democracy is commonly thought of as the culmination of maturation for any nation. And the topic is as hot as ever: The citizens of some countries like Iran are raising the call for “freedom”, while others are celebrating years of freedom from oppressive regimes. The world watches America’s democratization efforts in Afghanistan, and news networks all over the world are discussing how social networking sites like Twitter affect freedom of speech and democratic governance on a global scale.

But this age of information and globalization has placed new and unexpected challenges on many democracies, both young and old. These challenges perplex analysts, politicians and ordinary people who put their faith in a system which emerged under a particular set of circumstances at the onset of the industrial revolution in the West.

Beyond King of the Mountain unpacks some of the current challenges our democratic systems are facing and specifically proposes that their future may lie in a mutualistic, non-adversarial paradigm. It suggests that democracy has come a long way in realizing the ideal of brotherhood and equality but will, perhaps, have to move from a win/lose to a win/win paradigm if it is to address humanity's needs. It questions the fact that we view democracy exclusively as a contest and suggests that “by the people for the people” can be realized in other, more inclusive ways, thus stimulating a consultation on the possibilities.

Questions to consult on before viewing the film:

1. What does democracy mean?
2. What is the difference between the “idea”/“ideal of democracy and the way we apply or structure democracy in various different countries around the world?
3. When we speak about democracy, do we always mean the same thing? How can we distinguish between:
 - a. Democracy as an idea
 - b. Democracy as it is applied in various countries
 - c. “Western Liberal Democracy” or democracy in large complex nation states in the “West”
 - d. Democratic governance as an idea
4. What are the values and assumptions (about human nature and how humans relate to each other) that inform our current applications of democracy, particularly in the “West”?

Questions to consult on after viewing the film:

1. Were you aware of some of the assumptions underlying our current models of democracy?
2. How important is it to be aware of the underlying values and assumptions underlying the way we relate to one another as a human family and, as a result, our societal structures, institutions and systems of governance?
3. What would happen in your own nuclear family, if your interactions were based on the competitive pursuit of self-interest? Can the idea of “selflessness” and cooperation that you may find in your nuclear family be applied to society at large?
4. Do you believe that humanity is always predicated on selfish interest or do we also have the capacity for selflessness and cooperation?
5. Are our interests as human beings always mutually exclusive or can we view them as complementary? If we view them as complementary, how could this affect political debate?
6. What would a political “conversation”(discussion) look like if it were based on complementarity of views?
7. Do you believe that it is possible to operate on an alternative set of assumptions about human nature and our relationship to one another? What might those assumptions be?
8. Our assumptions about the selfishness of human nature have led us to structure democracy as a contest for power. How might an alternative set of assumptions influence the way we structure democracy?
9. What would democracy look like if we based it on another set of assumptions? How would we construct a system that is “just”, “representative” and “diverse”. Bear in mind some of the problems democratic systems are currently facing, while being structured as contests of power, such as:
 - a. The dominant role of money in elections and the submission of government to market forces
 - b. Short-term planning horizons
 - c. Narrow, constituency-based planning horizons
 - d. The oversimplification of complex issues and the exclusion of diverse voices
10. Are we at the end of social evolution as a human race or do we have many more frontiers ahead of us? If we are not at the end, what is our next step as a human family?