

TELLURIDE
MOUNTAINFILM

14.c



Directed by George Knowles

Climbers all have a story about how they got started, and 14-year-old Kai Lightner’s introduction is particularly striking — and not only because he’s a brilliant climber. Much like Tiger Woods in golf or the Williams sisters in tennis, he could change the demographics of climbing. This film, directed by Telluride’s George Knowles, isn’t about race, however, it’s about family. His single mother has become his regular belay partner, one who also makes sure that he maintains straight A’s in school. It’s clear that she wants what’s best for her son, and if that means spending hours with her hands on a belay device and her neck craned upward, so be it. (USA, 2014, 9 minutes)

Discussing the Film:

The following questions are intended to spark discussion and activities related to both the content and storytelling elements of this particular film.

For more information on the filmmakers or to see other tour destinations and films, visit mountainfilm.org.

1. What were some of the most interesting images from 14.c? What sights and sounds do you remember the most about the film?
2. What do you think makes Kai Lightner an interesting central subject for the film? Give examples.
3. In the film, Kai and his mom talk about the importance of continuing school. How important are academics in your life and to your family? Talk about your favorite subject in school and why you like it.
4. Kai's mom supports him through travel and competitions, sometimes putting his needs before her own. What is one sacrifice that your parents have made for you in their life, large or small? Make sure to go home and thank them tonight!
5. What extracurricular activities or sports do you do? What is the value of those in your life? What do you gain/learn from them?
6. Do you think Kai's sacrifice is worth it? Why or why not?
7. If someone filmed you for a week, what are the most interesting things they would see?

Extensions:

1. **WATCH:** Visit director George Knowles' Goodie Pocket Films Vimeo site to watch more shorts, including a film with US silver medalist freeskiier, Gus Kenworthy: <http://vimeo.com/goodiepocket>.
2. **WATCH:** A student interview with Kai Lightner from Mountainfilm's 2014 festival on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RsD_ogLG1ZY.
3. **WATCH:** Kai Lightner speed climbing in the 2014 finals at the Ring of Fire competition <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zK4b9Woi0M>. Skip to 2:00 to see him negotiating a problem while hanging upside down. P.S. He won the competition!
4. **READ:** About Kai Lightner in an online article by *Outside Magazine*: <http://www.outsideonline.com/fitness/climbing/rock-climbing/Rock-Climbings-New-Prodigy.html> or find out more about Kai's life from a *DPM Climbing* article, "The World According to Kai": <http://www.dpmclimbing.com/articles/view/world-according-kai>
5. **DO:** Follow Kai Lightner in his blog online at <http://www.kai-lightner.com/blog/>. Show the short film 14.c to your friends by streaming it from Outside Television's site: <http://www.outsidetelevision.com/video/14c-evolv-athlete-kai-lightner>. Email Kai your questions and letters of

support at kaiclimbs@yahoo.com.

Filmmaker Conversation:

George Knowles, director of *14.c*

What was the filming process like? How did you create the story?

George: For this film, I was first contacted by my friend Sarah Wood from 5Point Film Festival. She told me about Kai and Connie and asked me if I could find a story there. I did some research, but everything that came up was all about Kai being one of the only African American climbers, which I didn't really want to be the story of the picture. We presented the movie to Kai's sponsor Evolv and they signed onto it. I paired with my filmmaker friend Josiah. Kai was in school for five of the seven filming days, so we had to schedule shooting in the mornings and evenings. We shot outdoors in West Virginia for 2-3 days. The story changed a lot. What really helped was that Connie invited us to stay at their house and that wasn't something I was planning. Going into it, a lot of my focus was on Kai, but as it developed there was a focal point of Connie. She really is a pretty amazing woman.

How important is finding a character like Kai to film?

George: A lot of films are very character driven. In terms of the filmmaking side, that's one of the most important parts. The characters create the relationship with the viewers. I had two characters to work with; they had two different audience demographics of who would see value in them. Kai relates to younger kids, and parents are really appreciative of Connie. It's Connie's sacrifice or devotion that makes parents really excited to see the film. It's extremely valuable to have that connection. It took me a few weeks of research on Kai and Connie, and the more I interacted with them through emails and on the phone, it became pretty apparent that they were unique.

***Discipline and sacrifice* seem to be themes of the film. Can you talk a little about this?**

George: Absolutely. That's something I really admired in Connie, these values she went out of her way to make Kai appreciate. Discipline is just a matter of setting goals and focusing on those goals. With Kai, it was a matter of sacrificing some of his time and not having as much of a social life. In order to climb he also has to maintain straight A's; there's a lot of discipline involved in the nature of the sport. There are important decisions that Kai has to make when he's on the wall. The other point in the film that I wanted to make relatable to people was that Kai was a normal kid. Climbing is not a diehard serious aspect of his life for him. He does it because he loves it.

What was your favorite part of the film?

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George: I think one of my favorite parts is Kai singing in the car. There's something about that moment. I know he hates it. I sat next to him at the premiere and he said, "Really! Did you have to put that scene in there?" To me, it's a personal moment, getting to share this experience with them and him being a silly 14-year-old kid. I really enjoyed being involved in their daily life. That simple moment is one of my favorites. Otherwise, I like Connie talking about how she hates the outdoors but still does it. It makes me think of my mom, getting me out to snowboarding or going to every one of my soccer games. I'm proud to have made that connection in the film.

Do you think the film has had an impact? Do you feel it is successful?

George: The film was originally meant to be a web piece and David Holbrooke urged me to submit it to Mountainfilm. It snowballed after that. The film really had an impact on Kai and Connie. Right when it got released, Kai picked up a handful of other sponsors. He's right on the verge of making a name for himself, so it's really the right time for him. It also made an impact on getting Kai and Connie to come to new places. Kai has really enjoyed meeting with students in different places. Seeing how inspiring he is to so many kids, it's a big payoff for his sacrifice and discipline in his sport. We've had lots of sold out showings and standing ovations. I really wasn't expecting that for the film. I hope it makes people feel inclined to leave the theater and get outside.

What piece of advice would you give to a student who wants to get into filmmaking?

George: I didn't go to film school. I went to school for Medieval European history. {Laughs} I guess education isn't the end-all. Just go out and do it. There's so much value in real world experience in filmmaking. Dealing with real world scenarios is much more important. With this film, I could only plan so much, and even the storyline I was expecting changed so much. The biggest thing is to go out and film with your friends. Always be looking for characters – it'll give you a subject to focus on and something to work towards. I'm still striving to get better at being a good storyteller, and having great characters is a huge part of that. Variety is also really important. Don't pigeonhole yourself into one subject matter. Ambition and drive are definitely more important than education and equipment.

What's your next project?

George: It's been a crazy couple of months. I just had a shoot in South Dakota, and then went to Brazil to shoot on a shark expedition for a month on a ship. I'm currently on my way to the Port Townsend Film Festival for a screening of *14.c*. That's something I really have to thank Mountainfilm for. After our screening in Telluride, the amount of interest we got for *14.c*, and the comments about how people feel about Kai and Connie, were really rewarding.

