

TELLURIDE

MOUNTAINFILM *ON* TOUR

FOR STUDENTS



The Reinvention of Normal

Directed by: Liam Saint-Pierre

2015 UK | Duration: 8 minutes

Film Summary

Toothbrush maracas, an umbrella with plant pots, a tea cup cooling fan and the reverse bungee. "Go straight off the wall," said his father, and Dominic Wilcox listened. This short film follows the London artist/inventor/designer on his quest to come up with something creative every day. The result is a font of productivity as he transforms the mundane and ordinary into surprises, wonders and, sometimes, just plain absurdities.

Teachers: *This film may be helpful before a project or activity that asks students to think outside the box.*

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Filmmaker Interview



"...I think it's more about inspiring people to find a passion that will give their life meaning, whatever the vehicle for that is."

– **Liam Saint-Pierre** | Director

Q: How did you learn about Dominic Wilcox, and why did this story appeal to you?

A: *I met Dominic a few years back through a photographer friend of mine. Dominic had made a pair of GPS shoes and wanted a video made, which I ended up doing. We kept in touch, and then last year he told me about a stained-glass car he was making and asked if I would shoot another video. However, I was interested in making a more comprehensive film that captured all aspects of his world, rather than just individual projects. I'm always drawn to passionate characters. Their joy for life is infectious and I want to share that with others. Often these people exist outside of the normal structures of society — the thing they love is so much stronger than any need to fit in and it's on the margins that I find them. In life there is a lot of suffering, but there is real joy too, with my films I always try to sit in the gap between the two.*

Q: When editing the film, was there anything you wished you could have included in the final cut?

A: *There was a shot that I had to lose where Dominic walked with an umbrella on a sunny day and rain came from inside the umbrella. I'd had that as an ending, which to me felt similar in spirit to the ending of *Being There*, but it didn't work for a few reasons so had to go.*

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Q: When you made the film, did you have a specific audience in mind?

A: *Not really. I knew he was such an interesting character and I thought most people would enjoy his playful approach to life.*

Q: Is there a specific action you hope people are inspired to take after seeing this film?

A: *I never really thought about trying to create a specific reaction, but on reflection I think it's more about inspiring people to find a passion that will give their life meaning, whatever the vehicle for that is.*

Q: "Thinking outside the box" is a recurring theme in this film. Why is this issue so important?

A: *We often trick ourselves into thinking our life is fixed in a certain way, that it's too late to change or we're not good enough, but this is not how it has to be. Dominic shows that on a playful and imaginative level, but really it's about having the courage to make mistakes, to worry a little less about what other people think and do things that give your life meaning.*

Q: The film touches on a father-son relationship. What role do you see parents playing in their children's lives when it comes to artistic pursuits?

A: *For me it's about parents supporting their child's passion, whatever that is. I have a niece who is 16, her mum's a community artist who got her involved in lots of art projects, yet my niece is completely fascinated with physics. So for me it's about opening up different worlds for children, and supporting them along whichever path they take.*

Q: What are some of the challenges you encountered in the making of this film?

A: *I shot the film myself and though the camera gave a nice image, it was not always that practical and meant I had to record sound separately. This then can mean that it's hard to stay focused for long periods of time, especially when doing interviews. Other challenges are just getting the subject to relax and forget about the camera. Dominic is experienced about presenting his work; however, I wanted to make it feel more personal than his normal presentation of his ideas.*

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Q: Why did you decide to include this film in Mountainfilm for Students?

A: *I have loved film from a very young age, but I never had the opportunity to study film when I was growing up and had to teach myself. I wonder where I would be now if I had been given that opportunity when I was younger, so anything I can do to help students is important.*

Q: What does working in a documentary format allow you to do that other film formats (like Hollywood-style narrative) would not?

A: *For me I like narrative as well and what's important is the stories we tell. That said I think that documentaries can be incredibly inspiring, because they are real and not just a fantasy. Also, there are just some things that are stranger than fiction. When the film came out, quite a few people thought that it wasn't real and were amazed to hear it was.*

Q: What's the next big adventure or film project on the horizon for you?

A: *I've just finished a short narrative film that was commissioned by Project Ocean, an environmental project to raise awareness about plastic usage and its effects on the sea. I'm also finishing another documentary, this time it's about a 70-year-old general practitioner from India, who has been working in England for the last 35 years. Besides being a doctor, he's also an Elvis Presley impersonator, and all the money he raises from his performances goes to a school for children from the slums of Kolkata! Apart from that, I'm keen to do a longer form documentary, though I'm still to find my subject!*

Q: Any parting thoughts for Mountainfilm for Students?

A: *Make films about what moves you. Learn to enjoy the process, as that's all there is.*

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Tags

Arts

Creativity

Design

Introverted Personalities

Inventions

Math-Science

Photography

Play-Based Learning

Problem-Solving

Video

Pre-screening Activity

Discuss what constitutes an invention. Have students identify one useful thing in their life and consider how it may have been invented. Ask for suggestions on inventions that must have seemed extremely silly at first, but then eventually became practical. Discuss the creative process and how important it is as opposed to results-based thinking. Ask students to imagine an absurd invention of their own.

Introducing the Film

1. Ask students what they already know about inventions. Fill in key information as needed:
 - a. Name some famous inventors. What are their stories?
 - b. What distinguishes an artist from an inventor? Can someone be both?
 - c. What does it mean to patent an invention?
2. Review vocabulary: invention, play-based learning
3. If students aren't familiar with documentary film, review the characteristics that distinguish documentaries from other film formats.
4. Give students an assignment for viewing (e.g., looking for how the subject solves a particular problem or what the students notice about the film's messages about the process of inventing). Be sure they know why you are showing them this particular film (and how it connects to other work they are doing or subjects they are studying).

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Discussion Question Categories

General/Open Prompts

1. What was an important issue brought up in this film?
2. Name one thing you saw in the film that inspired you, one thing that made you mad or sad, and one thing you want to know more about.
3. Imagine going home and telling a friend or family member about this film. What would you say?
4. What is one lesson you learned from the film that you wish everyone in your family or community or school knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?
5. What did you learn from the film about the tools needed to invent?
6. What did you notice about the process of inventing?
7. If you could ask anyone in the film one question, who would you ask and what would you ask them? What is interesting to you about that question?

Exploring Self

1. What did you see in the film that made the strongest impression on you? What was it about that moment that moved you?
2. Could any of Dominic's inventions work in your community? If not, what would?
3. Would you recommend this film to a friend? Explain your reasons.
4. If you were going to send a text message to a friend about this film, what would it be?
5. In what ways is Dominic like you or like someone you know? In what ways is he different?
6. Dominic's mother and father enjoy his creative side. Do you think your parents understand the things you like to do? What could Dominic say to encourage his parents' support? How might this apply to conversations you could have with your own parents?

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7. What life lessons can be learned from the choices Dominic made in this story? How can you apply the lessons in the film to your own life?
8. Dominic's father says he had hoped he would take over the family business but also encourages Dominic to go "straight off the wall." Do you think Dominic's father was disappointed or excited about his son's choice to be an inventor? What's your evidence? In your experience, what role do/can parents play in nurturing children's creativity?
9. Dominic says making decisions quickly helps him get in touch with his heart and instincts as opposed to analytical thinking. Have you ever felt connected to something that made you feel that same way?
10. What similarities do kids share when faced with inventing something of their own? Do you think you would try inventing? How do you approach new experiences and the challenges that come with them? Do you think trying new experiences is brave? If so, why?
11. Have you ever assumed that inventing things wasn't for you? Why did you feel that way? Did the film change your opinion?

Exploring the World

1. Before viewing the film, what did you know about inventing? In what ways did the film affirm or challenge your assumptions of the process?
2. Dominic is an artist/designer living in the large city of London. Do you think living in a big city makes it easier or harder for Dominic to do what he loves?
3. What similarities do you notice that Dominic shares with you and your friends?
4. Could the process of inventing benefit critical thinking? Explain why or why not?
5. How does a person become an artist, designer or inventor? How is design important to being an inventor?

Exploring Filmmaking

1. What questions do you think the filmmaker was trying to answer? How do you know?
2. In one word, how did the film make you feel? What techniques did the filmmaker use to make you feel that way?

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3. What important perspectives do you think are missing in the film? What additional voices would you have included and why?
4. Describe the symbols (conventional or other) used in this story, both those that have meaning outside of the story and those that have meaning only within the story. What does each stand for?

Exploring Social Issues

1. Where do you think most people find creative inspiration?
2. Dominic says the creative process is important. Why do you think he says that?
3. What do you think school or your class would be like if you had a teacher like Dominic?
4. What could you do to make your school or community more “invention-friendly”?

Sense of Wonder

1. How do you think Dominic felt when he created his first invention and shared it with family or friends? What do you suppose he was thinking when he made the decision not to take over the family business?
2. What do you think Dominic has learned from his experience being a designer and inventor?

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Extensions



Watch

Susan Cain Discusses the Power of Introverts | TED

http://www.ted.com/talks/susan_cain_the_power_of_introverts?language=en



Read

News, Updates, Photos and Latest Projects | Dominic Wilcox

<http://dominicwilcox.com>

Variations on Normal Blog | Dominic Wilcox

<http://variationsonnormal.com>

Common-Day Items and Their Inventors' Stories | PBS

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/telephone/sfeature/>

Top 10 Inventors of All Time | Biography Online

<http://www.biographyonline.net/scientists/top-10-inventors.html>

How to Be An Inventor (Illustrated Slides) – Grades 1–4 | PBS

http://pbskids.org/martha/stories/truestories/inventor_story.html

How to Be An Inventor in 5 Easy Steps – Grades 6–12 | Popular Mechanics

<http://www.popularmechanics.com/technology/a5982/how-to-become-an-inventor-in-5-steps/>

The Art of Storytelling by StoryCorp and Humans of New York | TED

<http://ideas.ted.com/the-art-of-storytelling-according-to-the-founders-of-storycorps-and-humans-of-new-york/>

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Do

Invent It. Build It. A Workbook for Instructors and Students – Grades 4–9 | PBS

<http://www->

[tc.pbskids.org/designsquad/pdf/parentseducators/DS_Invent_Guide_Full.pdf](http://www-tc.pbskids.org/designsquad/pdf/parentseducators/DS_Invent_Guide_Full.pdf)

Resources, Puzzles, Games and Activities – Grades K–12 | USA Patent & Trademark

<http://www.uspto.gov/kids/>

Build or Make an Invention for Teenagers – Grades 9–12 | USA Patent & Trademark

<http://www.uspto.gov/kids/build.html>

Mini Invention-Themed Lessons – Grades 1–12 | Scholastic

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/lessonrepro/lessonplans/theme/inventions.htm>



Book Recommendations (NF: Nonfiction, F: Fiction)

NF | Grades 1–3

Hoop Genius: How a Desperate Teacher and a Rowdy Gym Class Invented Basketball,
by John Coy

[http://www.amazon.com/Hoop-Genius-Desperate-Basketball-Carolrhoda-](http://www.amazon.com/Hoop-Genius-Desperate-Basketball-Carolrhoda-ebook/dp/B00GIRTT2O/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634514&sr=1-)

[ebook/dp/B00GIRTT2O/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634514&sr=1-](http://www.amazon.com/Hoop-Genius-Desperate-Basketball-Carolrhoda-ebook/dp/B00GIRTT2O/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634514&sr=1-)

[1&keywords=how+a+desperate+teacher+and+a+rowdy+gym+class](http://www.amazon.com/Hoop-Genius-Desperate-Basketball-Carolrhoda-ebook/dp/B00GIRTT2O/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634514&sr=1-)

F | Grades 1–4

Pop! The Invention of Bubble Gum, by Meghan McCarthy

[http://www.amazon.com/Pop-Invention-Bubble-Meghan-McCarthy-](http://www.amazon.com/Pop-Invention-Bubble-Meghan-McCarthy-ebook/dp/B0068T28A2/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634471&sr=1-)

[ebook/dp/B0068T28A2/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634471&sr=1-](http://www.amazon.com/Pop-Invention-Bubble-Meghan-McCarthy-ebook/dp/B0068T28A2/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634471&sr=1-)

[1&keywords=pop+the+invention+of+bubble+gum+by+megan+mccarthy](http://www.amazon.com/Pop-Invention-Bubble-Meghan-McCarthy-ebook/dp/B0068T28A2/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634471&sr=1-)

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F | Grades 4–6

Day-Glo Brothers, by Chris Barton and Toni Persiani

http://www.amazon.com/Day-Glo-Brothers-Chris-Barton/dp/157091673X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634555&sr=1-1&keywords=day+glow

F | Grades 4–9

The Invention of Hugo Cabret, by Brian Selznick

http://www.amazon.com/Invention-Hugo-Cabret-Brian-Selznick/dp/B007Y9HQNY/ref=sr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634584&sr=1-2&keywords=the+invention+of+hugo+cabret+by+brian+selznick

NF | Grades 5–8

Girls Think of Everything: Stories of Ingenious Inventions by Women, by Catherine Thimmesh and Melissa Sweet

http://www.amazon.com/Girls-Think-Everything-Ingenuous-Inventions/dp/0618195637/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634614&sr=1-1&keywords=girls+think+of+everything

NF | Grades 9–12

Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True Inspiration, by Ed Catmull

http://www.amazon.com/Creativity-Inc-Overcoming-Unseen-Inspiration-ebook/dp/B00FUZQYBO/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1438634641&sr=1-1&keywords=creativity+inc