

TELLURIDE

MOUNTAINFILM * ON * TOUR



Throw

Directed by: Darren Durlach & Dave Larson
2016 USA | Duration: 11 minutes

Film Summary

Growing up in East Baltimore surrounded by poverty and violence is hard enough, and Coffin Nachtmahr had the added challenge of being different. He stutters. He never quite fit in, and he was picked on. Then he discovered a lifeline in the unlikelyst of pursuits: yo-yoing. In the subculture of “throwers,” he found purpose, acceptance and community. Today, Coffin is the city’s best, transforming the simple activity of yo-yoing into a transfixing dance of creativity, innovation and connection.

Teachers: *This film can be used to support classroom work on entrepreneurship and leadership; resilience and perseverance; inclusion and stereotyping; performing arts; and/or the physics of toys.*

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Filmmaker Interview: Darren Durlach & Dave Larson



"I love meeting people and telling their stories. I believe that everyone is inherently interesting and they have a unique story to tell."

- **Dave Larson** | Director

Tell us a little about yourself, Darren & Dave.

Where did you grow up?

DD: Richmond, Virginia.

DL: My family and I moved around a lot growing up, but starting at age 10, I lived in Dover, Delaware.

What is your favorite color?

DD & DL: Green

What is your favorite food?

DD: Mexican (anything).

DL: Oh, tough question. Thai food... or pizza... no wait, Thai. Final answer.

What is your favorite movie?

DD: *Big Trouble in Little China*

DL: I am not going to lie. There are a ton of great movies out there, but I have to go with *Groundhog Day*. Classic Bill Murray.

If you could have any super power, what would it be?

DD & DL: Flight. That would be cool.

What is one thing you are afraid of?

DD: Insignificance

DL: Being buried alive.

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Q: Why did you become a filmmaker and how did you get started?

DD: I went to journalism school at Radford University where I learned a lot about video production. I always enjoyed photography and got my foot in the door at a small TV station in Virginia as a production assistant helping with the studio cameras. From there I really caught the bug and loved meeting people, telling stories and trying to make a difference. I eventually got a job at *The Boston Globe* making short films and have now started this production company to grow and make more films.

DL: I became a filmmaker for two reasons. 1) I love meeting people and telling their stories. I believe that everyone is inherently interesting and they have a unique story to tell. 2) I love photography and the idea of beautifully capturing my environment. Filmmaking allows me to do both in a way that is creative and expressive. I began my career as a photojournalist. It is where I learned to interact with people and my surrounding to bring back the best story possible. It was only natural that I progressed into the world of filmmaking.

Q: How did you meet Coffin and why did this story appeal to you?

DD: I'll let Dave answer the part about meeting Coffin. He made the first contact. His story appealed to me because he's a fascinating untold story of the inspirational people in Baltimore. He's overcome a lot in his life and is one of the most talented people I know.

DL: I met Coffin in the park by my house. We crossed paths one afternoon and I saw him yo-yoing and walking. I thought he had an interesting look and a unique skill that I thought would be interesting to film. It was only when we began interviewing him that we started understanding his bigger story. What appealed to me was the idea that this kid, who has led a tough life, has found salvation and a way out through the use of a toy. Yo-yoing is so simple but it gave him so much.

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

DD: When we do commercial work, we always have an audience in mind. In this case we didn't. At least I didn't. We tried to make a film that we would enjoy watching and get something out of, and that's what we went for.

DL: Not really. I felt like the story was pretty universal and something that everyone could identify with.

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

DD: There are so many interesting aspects of his personality that we wanted to include. His obsession with taxidermy, or his death metal band. More skateboarding. In the end, we did our best include only things that propelled his story forward.

DL: There is a lot that I would have included in the film that we did not have time to fully flush out. For example, I would have loved to dive deeper into his friend's story about how Coffin saved him. I would have loved to expand on his story to give a better impression of the troubles that the youth of Baltimore face every day growing up.

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

DD: I hope people see that Coffin is courageous and not afraid to try things. That's the biggest lesson I got out of this. Coffin will try anything and he's not afraid to fail. So as many times as something doesn't work out for him, a lot of things do work out for him.

DL: I hope that people reexamine their own lives and figure out what inspires them. Preferably something that allows them to interact with people in a positive way.

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

DD: When Coffin is nervous he has a hard time speaking. His stutter gets worse. We tried a couple different things to help him stay calm. We interviewed him while he was yo-yoing because the yo-yo calms him down. We also interviewed him with his friends at one point and he felt very comfortable around them.

DL: A big challenge was overcoming Coffin's stutter. There were times when he couldn't answer a question or it took so long for him to get the words out that we had to redo the interview. That was a huge hurdle in the editing bay. We wanted his stutter to come across, but not in a painful way that got in the way of the story.

Q: Was Coffin ever apprehensive to let you into his personal life? Did you see any changes in him once you had finished filming?

DD: He never minded for one moment. He seemed to really enjoy the process. This is just my opinion but I felt like he was proud of himself when he saw how awesome his is.

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DL: One thing that is great about Coffin is that he is an open book. He never had a problem letting us into his life. With that said, the biggest change that we saw through out filming was how he opened up to us and how comfortable he was around the cameras and our presence. I think he was a little guarded in the beginning but the more time we spent with him the more he opened up.

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

DD: I think kids can get a lot out of this message. Don't be afraid to fail. Keep getting up and moving on.

DL: I think that Coffin's message is incredibly inspiring, especially for students. I think most students and kids find themselves in situations at times that make them feel undervalued. Coffin's story is an example of not letting what others think of you dictate your view of yourself.

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

DD: We're a commercial production company with a ton of projects in the works but this was a passion project that we put our own time and (mostly) our own money into for the sake of doing something great. It's part of a new series we're creating called "invisible thread," which is going to profile people who have interesting stories. We're currently looking for the next one.

DL: We are always looking for great stories and we are currently exploring a few. We want to expand our "Invisible Thread" series and tell some more stories of great people. We also want to do an in-depth look into the city of Baltimore and how the environment here plays a part in the economic and social disconnect.

Q: What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

DD: Do great work and everything else will naturally follow with it.

DL: Don't worry about screwing up and don't try to be perfect. All your failures and pitfalls are what help you to learn.

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Subject Interview: Coffin Nachtmahr



"We don't know how much time we have. Take full advantage of what you've got."

- Coffin Nachtmahr | Subject

Tell us a little about yourself, Coffin.

Where did you grow up? East Baltimore, Maryland.

What is your favorite color? Primarily black, but I like to accent with purple, red or maybe neon green.

What is your favorite food? A tough call. I really like potatoes, sushi, tacos, cheese pizza, and berries with granola. However, a bowl of cereal reigns supreme in my book.

If you could have any super power, what would it be? I'd likely just become a mad scientist because I would have no limits and my possibilities would be exponentially endless.

What is one thing you are afraid of? Perhaps heights or just the concept of falling. I climb buildings all the time and love being high above the city just looking down at it. So perhaps my biggest fear is something greater than that.

Q: Why did you decide to share your story?

A: I didn't really know what to expect from the project, so my story was just being asked questions about myself and really diving in to answer them.

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

A: Besides getting a yo-yo or a hobby, I want to see people take pride in what they love doing. Make it a part of you, an extension of your being. If you can, help others find what they are passionate about, especially if it keeps us together.

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

A: My biggest obstacles were stage fright, speaking and myself. I couldn't have music playing while we recorded so I was very nervous, very tense for the first few shoots. I absolutely need music to yo-yo well otherwise I feel out of sync with myself and the yo-yo. With stage fright, filming a yo-yo video that's 3 minutes long, takes hours for me because when the camera is on I can never seem to land the tricks I really want to do. Speaking, this is more obvious of an issue for me as I absolutely avoid long stretches of speech and like to give short answers, but Dave and Darren had to push me to explain things. When you stutter it's like knowing what you want to say but you're struggling to even have the ability to say it. Your breath becomes very short and repeating yourself is even harder. Filming consists of lots of repetition.

Q: What first interested you about throwing? How did you get started?

A: Nothing really got me interested directly before I decided to yo-yo, however after I started I didn't want to stop and seeing the Bombsquad SF and SaveDeth videos really pushed me to keep going. I got started just walking around the toy store and I saw this lime green yo-yo on an end cap and my life changed right in that moment.

Q: You mention in the film that throwing helps you deal with different hardships you experience. What advice would you give kids in similar situations?

A: When you have something that makes you feel confident about yourself and your abilities, you feel invincible. Nothing can stop you, there are literally no barriers that you can't overcome but it is only through actual experience and sometimes hardships that you will learn that. Always push yourself.

Q: What's the next adventure on the horizon for you?

A: My next adventure is hopefully a trip back to Telluride. There's a snowboard there that I really wanted and I plan to get it. Beyond that I'm unsure—I'm just letting the wind carry me these days. Growing up here just makes me want to leave all the time so any adventure is better than being stagnant.

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Q: What is one piece of advice you can give students that you wish someone had shared with you?

A: One piece of advice I would give is "Do More." It's a saying me and a few of the guys in OhYesYo say all the time. It means to above and beyond, challenging yourself and others to be better, to learn or do something new.

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Tags

African American Men

Bullying

Differently Abled

Entrepreneurship

Leadership

Resilience

Street Performers

Stuttering

Style/Fashion

Throwing

Urban Culture

Urban Violence

Yo-yo

Pre-screening Activity

Screen five seconds from the beginning of the film that shows Coffin painting black around his eyes. Freeze frame before he starts speaking and ask: Who do you think he might be? What do you think he might be doing? What's your evidence and where do your ideas come from?

After giving students a few minutes to answer and discuss, segue to the film by saying something like, "As we view the film, see if the ideas you had and the way you used evidence led you to an accurate conclusion."

Introducing the Film

1. To provide context about where the film is set, ask students what they know about growing up as a black male in Baltimore. Be sure they can find Baltimore on a map and fill in any important gaps in their knowledge.
2. Review vocabulary: yo-yo
3. If students aren't familiar with documentary films, review the characteristics that differentiate documentaries from other genres.
4. Give students an assignment for viewing—e.g., "Look for ways that the young man in this film demonstrates resilience." Be sure they know why you are sharing with them this particular film and how it connects to other work they are doing or subjects they are studying.



Discussion Question Categories

General/Open Prompts

1. Was your prediction about Coffin in the pre-screening activity accurate?

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2. What did you notice about (fill in the original viewing prompt) ?
3. Imagine going home and telling a friend or family member about this film. What would you say?
4. Name one thing in the film that inspired you, one that made you mad or sad, and one thing you want to know more about.
5. If you could ask Coffin one question, what would you ask?
6. What did you learn from this film about (fill in curriculum connection) ?
7. What's one lesson from this film you wish everyone in your family or community knew? What do you think would change if everyone knew it?
8. Would you recommend this film to a friend? Explain your reasons.

Exploring Self

1. In what ways are Coffin and his friends, Satarian and Eno, like you or someone you know? In what ways are they different?
2. What life lessons can be learned from this story? How can you apply the lessons of the film to your own life?
3. Coffin opens the film by saying, "I wasn't like all the rest of the kids. People would pick on me just for being me." Have you ever experienced or witnessed anything like that? How did you respond?
4. After finding the yo-yo, Coffin said, "I gave up caring what people thought." What do you think gave Coffin the courage to try something new and unusual?
5. Coffin compares his yo-yo to a security blanket. Do you have (or wear) anything that gives you confidence or support? How does having (or wearing) it make you feel stronger?
6. Coffin says, "If someone's not comfortable with their life, they should do something to change it." Is there anything about your life you want to change? What would help you to actually make that change?

Exploring the World

1. Before viewing the film, did you ever think of yo-yoing as an art form? Does watching the throwers in the film change the way you think about art?
2. What did you learn from this film about the tools needed to thrive even when surrounded by poverty and violence?

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3. Satarian recalls responding in awe when he first saw Coffin throw: “How do you do this?! Show me! Tell me your secrets!” How did Coffin’s response (giving him a yo-yo and recommending that he play with it) exemplify leadership?
4. Based on his love for throwing and with limited financial resources, Coffin starts his own business (OhYesYo) designing and selling t-shirts and yo-yos. If you were going to create a business based on something you love, what would that business be? Have you ever imagined yourself starting a business? What initial steps would be required to get it going? What would it take to make it a success?

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?
3. What messages do you think the filmmakers were trying to convey with the use of camera angle, slow motion and close-ups of Coffin and his yo-yos?
4. What did you notice about the use of music in the film?
5. Are there any important perspectives that are missing in the film? If so, what/who would you have added and why?

Exploring Social Issues

1. Were you surprised to find out that Coffin was a champion “thrower”? Where do our expectations of who people are come from? How do those ideas benefit or limit us?
2. Coffin acknowledges that his stutter makes it hard for him to communicate. The yo-yo gives him a way to express himself that doesn’t involve words. How can/do you communicate without words? Can you think of any examples of non-verbal communication forms that bring people together in ways word-based communication can’t?
3. What did you think of Coffin’s fashion? How do you think people in your school or community would respond if they just saw him walking down the street (and didn’t know he was a champion thrower)?

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4. Both Coffin and Satarian say throwing helped them shut out the negativity of people around them being injured or killed. Is there violence in your community? What do you do to escape? What do you do to keep yourself grounded?
5. Coffin says it was “really important for a teenager to have that sense of connection, especially when I’m not getting it from my family.” How did belonging to a community of throwers help Coffin cope with the difficulties in his life? What could you or the people in your community do to make sure that every young person experienced that sense of belonging?
6. Even though Coffin discovered his first community of throwers via the internet, he called out screen-based electronics like cell phones, tablets and game systems, saying that they “cut out the real human interaction that people need in order to move forward.” What do you think?
7. Coffin’s experience taught him that, “something as small as a yo-yo can create a group of people and be the thing that holds them together. But all of their ideas are from different places, and they can make so much from just being together.” Think about the groups that you are a part of—what holds them together? Does the group demand conformity, or does it get its energy from bringing together diverse people and celebrating their differences (the way that throwing does for Coffin)?

Sense of Wonder

1. What did you take away from the shots of people on the street watching Coffin throw? What was it like for you to watch him?
2. Coffin observes, “a toy is so simple, but it can be so complex.” What do you think he means?
3. Coffin says, “if I can...bring someone joy, then I’ve done something today.” What is it about Coffin’s performance and approach that brings joy? What could you do today to bring someone joy?

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Extensions



Watch

The Beauty of Being a Misfit (Mild Language) | Lidia Yuknavitch, TED

http://www.ted.com/talks/lidia_yuknavitch_the_beauty_of_being_a_misfit

How We Cut Youth Violence in Boston by 79 Percent | Jeffrey Brown, TED

http://www.ted.com/talks/jeffrey_brown_how_we_cut_youth_violence_in_boston_by_79_percent



Read

Baltimore City Kids Learn Lacrosse, and to 'Fully Embrace' a Positive Identity Through BCLL Program | The Baltimore Sun

<http://www.baltimoresun.com/sports/high-school/bs-gl-sp-good-works-baltimore-city-harlem-lacrosse-and-leadership-0418-20160417-story.html>

Learn More About Yo-Yo Types, Tricks & Throw Culture | YoYoExpert

<http://yoyoexpert.com>



Do

Lesson: Write Your Story, Change History | Brad Meltzer, TEDEd

<http://ed.ted.com/lessons/write-your-story-change-history-brad-meltzer>

Learn How to Yoyo with Your First Yoyo | YouTube

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ldYEUsSUS8>

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Book Recommendations (NF: Nonfiction, F: Fiction)

F | Grades 9–12

Bang!, by Sharon G. Flake

https://www.amazon.com/Bang-Sharon-Flake/dp/078684955X/ref=sr_1_3?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1471025929&sr=1-3&keywords=bang

NF | Grades 6–12

Lucky's Collectors Guide to 20th Century Yo-Yos: History & Values, by Lucky J. Meisenheimer

<https://www.amazon.com/Luckys-Collectors-Guide-Century-Yo-Yos/dp/0966761200>

F | Grades 8–12

Go Ask Alice, by Anonymous

https://www.amazon.com/Go-Ask-Alice/dp/1416914633/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1471021562&sr=8-1&keywords=go+ask+alice