ABOUT THE BIG SKY DOCUMENTARY FILM FESTIVAL
The Big Sky Documentary Film Festival is the premiere venue for non-fiction film in the American West. Big Sky offers an ideal setting for filmmakers to premiere new work and develop lasting relationships with fellow filmmakers and industry. The festival draws an audience of 20,000 and film entries from every corner of the globe to a uniquely intimate mountain town setting with a local Montana flavor. The festival hosts over 200 visiting artists, presents an average of 150 non-fiction films, and offers a variety of exciting events at the historic Wilma Theater, the Roxy Theater and the Zootown Arts Community Center in downtown Missoula.

ABOUT SPARK! ARTS
SPARK! Arts Ignite Learning is a collective-impact initiative of the Kennedy Center and is administered through Arts Missoula. SPARK! Arts works as a collaboration of local artists, arts organizations, business and community leaders, the City of Missoula, Missoula County Public Schools (MCPS), parents, philanthropists, and the University of Montana to ensure equity and access to a comprehensive arts education ecosystem for all K-8 MCPS students.

2022 BSDFF + SPARK! Films and Theme: What is important to you?
Every year Big Sky Documentary Film Festival has new film selections for its SPARK! Arts Enhancement screening. This year, BSDFF has the pleasure of providing a special screening for all 6th graders in MCPS, rated and reviewed by a select group of Missoula educators. This screening underscores benchmarks that fulfill National Core and Montana Content Standards. Having students attend this film screening of short documentaries opens the door to continued discussion of the craft of nonfiction film and encourages healthy media exploration while inspiring creativity.
ABOUT THE FILMS:

KAHULI – Chris Johns, Tucker Gragg – 27 minutes
Hawai‘i’s native snail species face an emergent threat and are rapidly disappearing. Kāhuli: Hawai‘i’s Last Forest Snails is a cinéma vérité documentary that offers a glimpse into this largely unknown and complex world through the eyes of cultural and scientific experts, each of whom guide us through what stands to be lost if Hawai‘i’s snails go extinct. This urgent story bears unprecedented biological and cultural significance and reminds us that local nature is an embodiment of Hawaiian identity and a precursor to life on these islands. More broadly, this documentary encourages reflection on our relationship with the rapidly changing natural world and shows us that even the smallest species are worth saving.

THE TRAILS BEFORE US – Fritz Bitsoie, Emma Hsu Jackson – 13 minutes
*Filmmakers will be meeting at local schools for a live Q&A – Wednesday, February 23rd!
THE TRAILS BEFORE US follows 17-year-old Nigel James, a Diné mountain biker as he hosts the first Enduro race in the Navajo Nation. Through revitalizing old sheep and livestock trails on his grandparents’ land, Nigel and a new generation of riders honor the connection to their land, community, and culture.
Big Sky Documentary Film Festival and the TRAILS BEFORE US filmmaking team will be visiting Meadow Hill, C.S. Porter and Washington middle schools for a special live Q&A to discuss the craft and content of the powerful short film following young Nigel James. Below is a brief background and exercise that breaks down the art of documentary filmmaking to better prepare you for this 6th grade arts experience!

The Art of Documentary Film

Many people think of documentaries as films that give you facts and figures about a topic. While some expository documentaries take this form, a documentary is any film that is non-fiction, and can take shape as a story, a portrait, or even visual poetry.

Here are some guiding questions for students to consider when discussing a documentary film:

- How do we know that this is a non-fiction film?
- Is there a narrative arc?
- Who is the main character of this film, and how do we get to know them? Is there a narrator? Voice over? Was the main character interviewed?
- What types of questions did the interviewer have to ask to get the information that we learn in the film? (Ex: What were your dreams when you were a child?)
- What kind of visual information is present? Do we learn about the character from shots of their surroundings? What do these look like?
- How does the filmmaker put the auditory and visual information together to tell a story? (Ex: Do we hear the subject talking about a memory in an interview while we see a shot of where that memory happened?)
- What is intended take away of the documentary? Is it a story about a person? Is it intended to provoke questions about a topic? Is the point to give information about an issue? Is it trying to promote action by the viewers?

Documentary Film Activity
What would you make a documentary about? Use this guide to think through all the pieces you would need to put together your own non-fiction film.

**TOPIC:**
What is your film about – a person, a place, an issue?

**STORY:**
Does your film tell a story? If it does, what scenes or elements of that story would you need to capture? Sometimes documentarians choose to tell stories entirely through “observational” footage of events. What events would you want to observe with your camera?

**INTERVIEWS:**
Who do you need to interview to tell this story? What are the bullet points of information (or, sound bites) you want to get for your film?

Now think of the questions you need to ask to get those answers or sound bites:

**VISUAL INFORMATION:**
What visual shots, or b roll, could you capture with a camera to support the information your viewer would learn from the interviews?
MUSIC:
Some filmmakers choose to incorporate music into their films. Would you add music, and if so, what?

(Ex: shots of a character’s home, shots of the environment, a scene of a character doing something that has been talked about)