

FRUITVALE STATION

USA 2013, 85 min.

German certification: minimum age 12
recommended for 14 years and older

Language: a choice between English or English with German subtitles

Director	Ryan Coogler
Script	Ryan Coogler
Cinematography	Rachel Morrison
Editing	Michael P. Shawver, Claudia S. Castello
Music	Ludwig Goransson
Cast	Michael B. Jordan Melonie Diaz Octavia Spencer Kevin Durand and others

About FRUITVALE STATION

In the early hours of New Year's Day 2009 at the Fruitvale train station in Oakland, California, white transport officers dragged a group of black men off the train while responding to a call. One officer shot and killed 22-year-old Oscar Grant while the group was detained on the platform. Oscar was anything but violent. The director recreates the final 24 hours in the life of Oscar Grant. He decides on New Year's Eve to be more honest to his girlfriend, a better father to his daughter, and a better son to his mother. On that day he helps a customer at the supermarket where he used to work, dumps the drugs he was dealing into the ocean, celebrates his mother's birthday, and goes into the city to celebrate New Year's Eve with his friends until his life was cut short by a police officer.

Ryan Coogler's prize-winning low-budget drama presents Oscar's daily routine and pressures as well as the harmonious relationships among different kinds of people, and people with different skin colours. This depiction of life in the Bay Area makes the racially motivated murder of Oscar Grant all the more shocking.

The worksheets address the following

- The film's dramaturgy and its quasi-documentary quality
- Similar cases of police violence in the USA and links to racism
- How the camera viewpoint represents relations of power and powerlessness, and how the lighting design portrays the characters

Publishing information

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Photo credits: DCM Filmdistribution

(All the stills are from the EPK of FRUITVALE STATION, published in Germany by DCM Filmdistribution. They serve as image quotations, to enable study of the film's content, and not as illustrations.)

Dramaturgy without suspense

FRUITVALE STATION refrains from using a classic suspense build up. Instead the film strings together several daily encounters.

In point form note what the following scenes reveal about Oscar and what the scene says about the coexistence of people of different backgrounds and skin colour.

Scene	Meaning for the film
Oscar meets a white customer in the supermarket and helps her out with a recipe.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Oscar takes care of a dog that had just been hit by a car.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
The train grinds to a halt just before midnight and everyone on it starts to dance.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
The white owner of a store allows the group to use his restroom.	<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Camera work and close-up

The camera in FRUITVALE STATION is always searching for a close-up shot of Oscar.

In a group discuss what meaning the meaning the close-ups have for the film. What position does the camera most often take when filming Oscar? What is the purpose of this angle?

Police violence in the USA and accusations of racism

More and more cases of police brutality in the USA are linked to racist motives.

In small groups, research some background information on the following cases. In doing so, pay special attention to:

- How police brutality is documented and announced in the media
- Reaction to these cases
- Consequences this violence has for the police force

1991	Rodney King	in Los Angeles, Kalifornien
1999	Amadou Diallo	in New York
2009	Oscar Grant	in Oakland, Kalifornien
2012	Trayvon Martin	in Sanford, Florida
2014	Michael Brown	in Ferguson, St. Louis, Missouri

Research film reviews in the USA on FRUITVALE STATION (for example, on the website www.rottentomatoes.com) and evaluate the critiques. What place does this film have in the discussion of everyday racism in the USA?

Camera Perspective and Power

The following stills are from the scene when the police detain Oscar and his friends on the platform.

For each still describe what perspective the camera takes and how this influences how the viewer perceives the characters. Consider the differences in camera proximity.





Racial profiling

Research the meaning of the term racial profiling. Compose a short definition in your own words.

Discuss together as a class the extent to which the charge of racial profiling applies to the events shown in the film FRUITVALE STATION. Compare the actual cell phone video at the beginning of the film with the restaging of the event at the film’s end.

Narrating with light



The stills shown here are from different scenes from the film FRUITVALE STATION. How does the lighting affect the scenes?

Describe the mood that the lighting creates.

How is Oscar portrayed in these images? What is symbolism of the light in these images for Oscar’s life?
