

PROMISED LAND



Niveau

Collège
Lycée

Promised Land

A film by Gus Van Sant /
Un film de Gus Van Sant



FROM THE DIRECTOR OF 'GOOD WILL HUNTING'

MATT DAMON
JOHN KRASINSKI
FRANCES McDORMAND

PROMISED LAND

What's your price?

FOCUS FEATURES presents in association with PARTICIPANT MEDIA and IMAGE NATION ASU BHARI A SUNDAY NIGHT PEARL STREET MEDIA FILM production
A GUS VAN SANT film MATT DAMON JOHN KRASINSKI FRANCES McDORMAND "PROMISED LAND" ROSEMARIE DEWITT AND MALCOLM MCDERMOTT WITH FRANCESCA WALKER AND
DILEY REEY ANDREW LINDS SANDROVICI MUSIC BY GUS VAN SANT COSTUME DESIGNER RON SCHMIDT EDITOR JEFF SKOGL PRODUCTION DESIGNER JONATHAN ADAMS
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS MATT DAMON JOHN KRASINSKI CHRIS MOORE PRODUCED BY JOHN KRASINSKI AND MATT DAMON WRITTEN BY GUS VAN SANT
DIRECTED BY GUS VAN SANT
CASTING BY DANIELA CLANCY
PRODUCTION OFFICE PARTICIPANT MEDIA
FOCUS FEATURES
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takepart.com/promisedland
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Technical specifications sheets

Directed by: Gus Van Sant

Writing credits: Matt Damon and John Krasinski (screenplay), Dave Eggers (story)

Produced by: Matt Damon, John Krasinski, Chris Moore

Original Music by: Danny Elfman

Cinematography by: Linus Sandgren

Film Editing by: Billy Rich

Casting by: Francine Maisler

Production Design by: Helen Scott

Art Direction: David Bowes

Costume Design by: Juliet Polcsa

Starring:

Matt Damon as Steve Butler

John Krasinski as Dustin Noble

Frances McDormand as Sue Thomason

Hal Holbrook as Frank Yates

Rosemary DeWitt as Alice

Sara Lindsey as Claire Allen

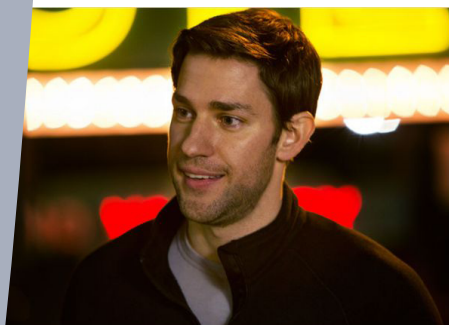
Ken Strunk as Gerry Richards

Joe Coyle as Michael Downey

Terry Kenney as David Churchill

Titus Welliver as Rob

Tim Guinness as Drew Scott



Introduction

What's the topic? / De quoi ça parle ?

Steve Butler, a corporate salesman, lands in a small town in the country, with his sales partner, Sue Thomason. Both of them see McKinley's citizens as likely to accept their company's offer – for drilling rights to their properties – as much-needed relief, following the economic decline of recent years. What seems like an easy job for the duo becomes complicated – professionally by calls for community-wide consideration of the offer by respected schoolteacher Frank Yates, and professionally and personally by a slick environmental activist...

Steve Butler, représentant d'un grand groupe industriel, se rend avec Sue Thomason dans une petite ville de campagne. Les deux collègues sont convaincus qu'à cause de la crise économique qui sévit, les habitants ne pourront pas refuser leur lucrative proposition de forer leurs terres pour exploiter les ressources énergétiques qu'elles renferment. Ce qui s'annonçait comme un jeu d'enfant va pourtant se compliquer lorsqu'un enseignant respecté critique le projet, soutenu par un activiste écologiste qui affronte Steve aussi bien sur le plan professionnel que personnel...

Why study *Promised Land*? / Intérêts pédagogiques

Through studying *Promised Land* we encounter the inner workings of a typical rural community in the United States and its identity today. It also allows us to discover the landscapes of the state of Pennsylvania. Without being simplistic, it gives students the opportunity to reflect about what is more important to them: protecting the planet or personal gain, particularly in the context of global economic recession. It can also encourage them to think about the issue of lobbying in contemporary society.

Le film permet d'étudier l'identité et la cohésion d'une communauté rurale américaine et de découvrir les paysages de Pennsylvanie. Loin d'être manichéen, il offre la possibilité de débattre avec les élèves sur ce qui est important pour eux : protéger la planète ou s'enrichir à titre personnel, dans un contexte de récession économique. Il est intéressant de réfléchir avec eux sur la place du lobbying dans le monde contemporain.



Before watching the film

Suggestion 1: Analyse the title

What does the word 'promise' mean?
What does *Promised Land* suggest about the film we are about to watch?
Could it have a double meaning?
Explain why you made these judgements?

Hint:

The word 'promise' means a declaration of something that will or will not be done. It suggests an **assured** expectation.

This title could have religious or spiritual connotations. In the bible, the promised land refers to a longed for place where one expects to find greater happiness or fulfilment. On a more literal level, this title could suggest land that has been promised on economic grounds, by means of a contract.

Suggestion 2: Watch the trailer

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AHQt1NAkhlo>

What key themes are highlighted in the trailer?
Do you want to see this film? Why/Why not?

Key themes:

Natural gas company
America's farming community
A poor community
The temptation of money



Suggestion 3: Analyse the posters

Hand each student a copy of the poster or alternatively display it on an OHP. This can be done before or after watching the film.

- Before: students should speculate what the imagery in the posters could suggest.
- After: students should analyse the imagery and relate this to examples from the film.



Suggested descriptions

Before viewing

In this poster we see a man stood in the middle of the countryside looking over his shoulder at the green landscape. Under the title, 'Promised Land', the words 'what's your price' are written. This could suggest that the characters in the film will have to make a decision between money and land.

After viewing

In this poster we see Steve Butler, stood in the middle of the countryside, which we can assume is in McKinley. He is looking back across his shoulder over the green landscape. This emphasises the importance of the land in this film, both for the townspeople, as it is their livelihood and tradition, and for Global, who would like to exploit it for energy. Steve is wearing normal clothes, a blue shirt and jeans, rather than a suit which reminds us of his ambiguous position in this film. While he works for Global and initially believes entirely that this town needs fracking, his character is not as simple as it seems. The landscape looks lush and healthy, as he is looking back, maybe he is questioning his own intentions.

Suggestion 4: Discuss these questions with your partner?

How green are you?

Discuss the meaning of "green" in this context.

In what ways are you green? (Do you ride your bike/walk to school? Do your parents have solar panels? etc.)

What does 'sustainable' mean?

Which forms of energy can be considered sustainable?

On the other hand, which can be considered unsustainable? Why?

a) You may want to create a ideas map with your students at this point. Ask your students what they think it means to be green and write this on an A4 sheet of paper and stick it to the board. Encourage them to be creative, give examples and explanations.

b) You could also create a pros and cons lists of various energy resources: natural gas, oil, nuclear, solar, wind, etc.

green: Environmentally friendly, environmentally conscious, energy efficient, sustainable...

sustainable: long-term, able to be maintained, for continual reuse.

Suggestion 5: A fun vocabulary exercise – Slap the board!

Go through this list of vocabulary with the students, either hand out a printed list or display them on the whiteboard. Discuss the meaning of each word, it may help to explain the context in which these words appear in the film to aid understanding.

Then take away the lists or erase the words from the whiteboard. Place the English words on pieces of paper on the board. Split the group into between two and four teams. Read out the French translation of the words. Students should run to the board and slap the corresponding word. Whichever team slaps the correct word first receives a point.

fracking - fracturation hydraulique	rural community - commune rurale
natural gas - gaz naturel	farm - ferme
corporation - société	farmer - fermier
renewable energy - énergie renouvelable	company - entreprise
shale gas - gaz de schiste	drinking water - eau potable
a drill - une perceuse	promise - promesse
drilling - forage, percement	land - terre
gas well - puits de gaz	environmentalist - écologiste
consumption - consommation	contaminate - contaminer

Suggestion 6: Around the theme of Water

Water crops up as a recurring image throughout this film. This vital resource is extremely precious and one which we can no longer take for granted; especially in a small town that is itself struggling to staying afloat. Daniel Clancy remarked: "We have put images water everywhere we could in the film. There are ponds on the farms and children who play with hose pipes". Steve splashes water on his face and he and Sue carry bottles of water everywhere with them.

L'eau est un motif récurrent dans l'univers visuel du film. Cette ressource vitale extrêmement précieuse ne peut désormais plus être tenue pour acquise, y compris dans une petite ville qui essaie elle-même de rester à flot. Daniel Clancy remarque : « Nous avons placé de l'eau partout où nous l'avons pu. Il y a des mares dans les fermes, des enfants qui jouent avec des tuyaux d'arrosage ». Steve s'asperge la figure, et lui et Sue emportent partout de l'eau en bouteille.

Dangers of Fracking to Drinking Water – <http://www.dangersoffracking.com/>

You may use this website to clearly illustrate to your students the process and risks of fracking.

Discuss these questions:

Why do you think the director has made the decision to focus on the theme of water?

How important is fresh drinking water to you in your everyday life?

How many everyday uses of water can you think of?

What would the consequences be if easily accessible water was taken away or polluted?

Hint:

Ask them to think not just about water for drinking but also, bathing, washing clothes, watering plants, feeding animals, washing dishes, cooking, etc. – note these ideas on the board in a spider diagram so the students can clearly see all the ideas.



Suggestion 7: If clauses

Choose the correct form of each verb in brackets and fill in the gaps for the following sentences.

Remember: If + present + future and If + imperfect + conditional

e.g. If I **allow** Global to drill on my land, I will become (to become) very rich.

If Global _____ (to drill) on my land, it is possible that they **will contaminate** my water supply.

If Global _____ (to pollute) my water supply, my family and the animals **would have** nothing to drink.

If my family and the animals **have** nothing to drink, I _____ (to lose) my farm.

If I _____ (to lose) my farm, I **would have** no income.

If I **have** no income, I _____ (to not be able to) provide for my family.

If we **let** fracking continue, who knows what _____ (to happen)?

Suggestion 8: Research

Research on the computer about hydraulic fracturing

- How does it work?
- What are the advantages?
- What are the disadvantages?
- Has 'fracking' only been successful in America?
- Can you find any real examples?
- What are the alternatives to fracking?

Sources you may want to use:

<http://www.what-is-fracking.com/>

<http://www.learnaboutshale.org/>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KT8CkDRFKnM&list=UUJ6jCm6P6sxesvDaiiHLCw&feature=c4-overview>

<http://investigations.nbcnews.com/news/2013/04/07/17616990-disputes-over-environmental-impact-of-fracking-obscure-its-future>

<http://marcelluscoalition.org/>

<http://www.energyfromshale.org/>

http://www.earthworksaction.org/issues/detail/hydraulic_fracturing_101#.Uxw-VvDtiuY

Then...

For younger classes - Make posters

Make informative posters about fracking individually or in pairs. The posters should explain how exactly fracking works and the advantages/disadvantages and give examples to support their findings. At this point you may want to split the class in half with the first half advertising the benefits of fracking and the other half warning of the possible dangers. Ask the students to present their posters to the class and explain what they have done.

and/or

For older classes - Debate in pairs

Student A: You strongly support fracking and believe that it is a revolutionary source of energy with minimal environmental impact and will bring great economic prosperity to the area.

Student B: You strongly oppose fracking based on the environmental risks and danger to fresh drinking water.

Suggestion 9: Steve's evolution

Except 1:

Steve Butler: 'I grew up in a large farming community, football Fridays, tractor-pulls, cow-tipping, all of it. I'm one of two guys in my graduating class who went to college and studied something other than agriculture. It's the biggest fight my grandfather and I ever had.

David Churchill: It's just the pride, I guess.

Steve Butler: No, it's delusional, self-mythology, it's bullshit. We had a Caterpillar plant down in davenport a few miles away, they closed that down my junior year, I didn't think anything of it. By the time my Senior prom rolled around, I got to see first hand just how little legs we had to stand on. I mean, the whole farming town fantasy just shattered. The truth was, without the plant, without the industry, we had nothing. And my whole town was.. (*trails off*). **I'm not selling them natural gas, I'm selling them the only way they have to get back.**

Excerpt 2:

Steve: We're a nine billion dollar company, ok? Do you know what we're capable of?

Dustin: Do you? Because all I see here is you and me, Steve. And one of us is a lot more confident than the other one.

Steve: Ha ha.. One of us is about to get punched in the fucking face.

Dustin: Steve, I know, this must be really frustrating for you and I'm sorry. You're doing all the things you've done in the past, it's just not working this time.

Steve: It's not working... I have 60% of this land bought and paid for. It's over!

Dustin: Steve, you could have 80% of this land bought, that's only 40% of the vote. **We're not fighting for land, Steve. We're fighting for people.**

Steve: These people need help, I'm here to give it to them. What are you doing?

Dustin: Steve, you're wrong. These people have changed, it's not just about the money anymore.

Excerpt 3:

Jeff Dennon: Listen, you seem like a nice enough man so I'm gonna be straight with you, so as to not waste your time. That little boy right there, he lost his father, my brother, six years ago in Falluja* . So you ain't got to lecture me on the whole foreign oil dependency routine. But let me ask you a question, Steve. If I do this, what am I telling that boy? What am I telling him about this farm that my daddy gave me and his daddy gave him? What am I telling him about what his daddy went to the desert to fight for? You see **Steve, you and I both know that the only reason you're here, is because we're poor.** How many wells you got up there in Manhattan? Or Pittsburgh? How about Philadelphia? Huh? It's ok, I get it, that's what us folks are here for, right? You about ready, Blake? (shouting to Blake) Listen Steve, you ain't ever gonna get what you came here to take from me. And to be honest with you, I don't even like the fact that you're here trying.

*city near Baghdad, Iraq

Excerpt 4:

Dustin: We were never gonna let them vote, Steve. (Smiles)

Steve: You're with Global... Jesus Christ, you're with Global.

Dustin: Did you really think they were going to leave something like this in your hands? After you let them bring it to a vote. **Steve, companies like Global, they don't rely on anyone, that's how they win. They win by controlling every outcome.** And they do that by playing both sides.

Steve: But, I was...

Dustin: What? What did you do? What is it you think you did? I did everything. Athena, that was me. This story is me. Getting you that package to give to the politician, that's me. You only did what I let you do. But you did a good job. Now it's over, we win.

Excerpt 5:

Steve: Ok, well, you all know that Dustin lied, he tried to get you to vote the way he wanted you to vote. And, that's exactly what he did because you are about to vote exactly how he wants you to vote, because Dustin is not an environmentalist, Dustin works for Global. They couldn't afford an environmental presence here, so they created their own. **They're trying to make this decision for you and they're betting that you'll let them.** This is a real farm, and they told these people exactly what I've told a lot of you, in fact I've looked a lot of you right in the eye and told you that there's a bunch of money under your feet and we can get it out, risk free, guaranteed, clearly that's not true. I'm sorry. Look is this gonna happen here? I honestly don't believe that it will. But they know the only reason we're all gathered here is to ask the question, 'what if it did?'

Print out the 5 excerpts and cut them up. Then ask the students to put them in chronological order.

At this point, you may want to ask students to act out the different excerpts in front of the class to illustrate the different scenes and to practise pronunciation.

Then ask them, in groups, to discuss why this moment of the film is significant for the evolution of Steve's character. The groups should report to the class what they discussed. The teacher should help with vocabulary, elicit questions and aid discussion.

Possible questions to prompt discussion:

What do you think Steve was thinking at this point in the film?

When watching the film, who did you identify with more, Steve or Dustin?

What did you think about the plot twist? Did you expect that to happen?

How do you think Steve's attitude to the townspeople changed?

How does your opinion of Steve/Dustin change throughout the film?

Translate the following phrase in bold from the excerpts:

Suggested translations:

I'm not selling them natural gas, I'm selling them the only way they have to get back.

Je ne leur vends pas du gaz naturel, je leur vends le seul moyen de rétablir la situation.

We're not fighting for land, Steve. We're fighting for people.

Nous ne nous battons pas pour la terre, Steve, mais plutôt pour les gens.

Steve, you and I both know that the only reason you're here, is because we're poor.

Steve, toi et moi, nous savons tous les deux que la seule raison pourquoi vous êtes ici, c'est parce que nous sommes pauvres.

Steve, companies like Global, they don't rely on anyone, that's how they win. They win by controlling every outcome.

Steve, les entreprises comme Global ne comptent sur personne, c'est leur manière de parvenir à leur fin. Ils gagnent en contrôlant chaque résultat.

They're trying to make this decision for you and they're betting that you'll let them.

Ils essaient de prendre cette décision pour vous et ils parient que vous allez les laisser faire.



Suggestion 10: Listen to an interview – True or False:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIXZ8BBWAY0>

Matt Damon wanted to make a film with an intense, political message.	T/F
He thinks that in life we cope with serious situations using humour.	T/F
Matt Damon and Frances McDormand worked together in 1994.	T/F
Matt and John disagreed about casting Frances for the role of Sue.	T/F
Sue was the first actor who agreed to take part in the movie.	T/F
Matt and John have very similar writing styles.	T/F
Matt had always wanted to write a movie about natural gas.	T/F

Suggestion 11: Write a review!

Give a brief summary of the film, the subject, when and where it takes place.

Did you like the film?

If yes, what especially did you like?

If no, explain what you did not like.

Who was your favourite character?

Were there any characters you didn't like?

Do you feel more informed about fracking after having watched the film?

Go further!

The American Dream

'The End of the American Dream?' – <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2tUlx5DlxaI> – 3:25

Watch this video with your class, ask them to take notes of anything they understand, (words, pictures, ideas, etc.).

“What issues does this video raise about big corporations and poverty in America?”

Students should discuss how the American Dream initially meant freedom, liberty and justice. But from the 1970s onwards big corporations have corrupted this dream as they used their power to take more “slices of the pie”, i.e. money, for themselves.

What relevance does this have to the film?

Script:

“Once upon a time at the dawn of the industrial age, millions flooded our shores with a dream. A dream to enjoy political freedom and economic freedom, to live in a land of liberty and justice for all. And our government took action when Wall Street wiped out the dream. For the thirty years after the Second World War, our Uncle Sam made us a patriotic promise: If you worked hard, played by the rules, you could make a better life for your family. When workers united to win better wages and working conditions, the government told businesses not to interfere. When their sons returned home from the war, the government gave these veterans a shot at a college degree, a good home and their own business. All that, a good education, a nice home, plus the protection of Social Security and Medicare when they grew old. Citizen activists and an active government made sure that as the country grew richer, everyone shared in our nation’s prosperity. But the CEOs of big corporations and Wall Street speculators wanted more pie for themselves. Starting in the 1970s, they tied Uncle Sam’s hands and rewrote all the rules. They detaxed themselves by slashing income taxes, capital gains taxes and the top marginal income tax rates. They deunionised their businesses by suppressing the labour movement and they deregulated the environment and fancy financial transactions like those subprime mortgage derivatives that brought the world to the brink of economic collapse. The end result, CEOs of big corporations and Wall Street speculators kept more of the pie. The share of national income, earned by the top 1% of Americans has increased from around 8% in 1974 to more than 18% in 2007. The top 0.01% of us, or 1 in 10,000 households soared the national income from four million in 1974 to 35 million on average in 2007. At the same time, workers have seen wages stagnate and even fall. We’ve gone from prosperity for all, to the rich takes all. And why should all American’s care? The income gap between the nation’s richest and poorest is the most powerful indicator of a functioning and healthy society. As income prosperity spikes, so too does rates of homicide, obesity, drug use, mental illness, anxiety, teenage pregnancies, high school dropouts. You have to wonder who will stand up to big corporate interests? Who has the power to mobilise millions. Is this the beginning of the end for the American dream? It doesn’t have to be, it’s time for us to unite and rebuild the American dream. All accross the country, workers are demanding good jobs, good jobs with decent wages are the backbone of our national greatness. The American dream can still be a reality. But they need you, Uncle Sam needs you.”

The American Dream – <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/american+dream>

1. the ideals of freedom, equality, and opportunity traditionally held to be available to every American.
2. a life of personal happiness and material comfort as traditionally sought by individuals in the U.S.

Suggestion 12: American Energy Independence

Excerpt from film

Steve: Yeah great, so I'm the bad guy. I mean, nevermind the fact that we use it. **You know we spend a billion dollars a day to fight for that stuff overseas?** When we've got this huge resource right here in our backyard, I mean, that's insane. And now I've got to deal with some hippie running around, I don't even know what that guy's saying.

Matt Damon interview: <http://screenrant.com/matt-damon-promised-land-interview/>
"What we really wanted to write about was America right now. Like where we are today. And you know, we were talking about American identity, and where we've come from and where we are and where we're headed. We knew that we wanted to have a hopeful ending and we wanted it to be pro-community, and a pro-democracy type of movie."

President Obama discusses progress in American energy: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L3jgGarkjv4>

One area where we've made great progress is American energy. After years of talk about reducing our dependence on foreign oil, we are actually poised to control our own energy future. Shortly after I took office we invested in new American technologies to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and double our wind and solar power, and today we generate more renewable energy than ever with ten of thousand of good American jobs to show for it. We produce more natural gas than anyone and nearly everyone's energy bills are lower because of it. And just this week, we learned that for the first time in nearly two decades, we learned that the United States of America now produces more of our own oil here at home than we buy from other countries, that's a big deal, that's a tremendous step towards American Energy independence.

The US cannot drill its way out of energy dependence

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/cif-green/2009/mar/20/oil-america-energy-independence>

extract:

"President Obama clearly believes America's addiction to oil is a national security problem, and is calling for the US to wean itself off foreign oil. Just six days into his presidency, he declared: "America's dependence on oil is one of the most serious threats our nation has faced. It bankrolls dictators, pays for nuclear proliferation, and funds both sides of our struggle against terrorism.""

Task:

Use these 4 sources to discuss the desire for American energy independence and why it so important for America today.

Imagine you're President Obama. Why would you want to encourage natural gas? What could be the real motivations behind a national push towards fracking? Write a paragraph to explain your motivations.

Hint:

Students should talk about the desire for energy independence from oil-rich countries in the Middle East.

Suggestion 13: “You’re only here because we’re poor!”

Why do you think natural gas companies choose to target those living in rural communities?

possible source to use with statistics on rural poverty: <http://www.dailyonder.com/poverty-highest-rural-america-rising-recession/2010/12/21/3098>

Suggestion 14: Gus Van Sant and realism in *Promised Land*

Juliet Polcsa raconte : «Gus a eu l’idée de demander aux acteurs principaux de porter leurs propres vêtements. Quand vous vous sentez bien dans des habits qui vous appartiennent, cela vous met un peu plus à l’aise avec votre personnage. J’ai discuté avec les acteurs pour trouver ce qui, dans leur garde-robe, pouvait convenir au film.»

Juliet Polcsa said “Gus had the idea of asking the main actors to bring along their own items of clothing. When you wear clothes that belong to you, you feel more comfortable which puts you a bit more at ease with your character. I then talked to the actors to find what they had in their wardrobe that could suit the film.”

Why do you think Van Sant chose to put the actors in their own clothes?

Do you think the film seems realistic?

Van Sant also chose to cast extras from those who live in the town in which the film was shot, why do you think he chose to do this?

You may wish to recommend other films by Gus Van Sant.

Good Will Hunting (Gus van Sant and Matt Damon 15 years earlier)

Synopsis: Will Hunting is a boy genius who was severely abused as a child and has been in trouble with the law ever since. When Will finally agrees to get counseling to keep himself out of jail and with his girlfriend, he meets Sean, the therapist who will change his life. Good Will Hunting tells the poignant story of Will and Sean’s coming to terms with the blows life has dealt them and with the questions that lie in the future.

source: imdb

What are the similarities and differences between the two collaborations?

Milk - with Sean Penn

Using flashbacks from a statement recorded late in life and archival footage for atmosphere, this film traces Harvey Milk’s career from his 40th birthday to his death. He leaves the closet and New York, opens a camera shop that becomes the salon for San Francisco’s growing gay community, and organizes gays’ purchasing power to build political alliances. He runs for office with lover Scott Smith as his campaign manager. Victory finally comes on the same day Dan White wins in the city’s conservative district. The rest of the film sketches Milk’s relationship with White and the 1978 fight against a statewide initiative to bar gays and their supporters from public school jobs.

source: imdb

You may also wish to recommend a documentary about fracking to your students:

'Gasland' by Josh Fox <http://www.gaslandthemovie.com/>

Synopsis: Fox narrates his reception of a letter in May, 2008, from a natural gas company offering to lease his family's land in Milanville, Pennsylvania for \$100,000 to drill for gas. Fox then set out to see how communities are being affected in the west where a natural gas drilling boom has been underway for the last decade.

source: wikipedia

- Watch the trailer
- Look at the map of fracking across the world
- Is the documentary more or less effective in getting across the fracking debate?