

Garlic is as Good as Ten Mothers (1980), directed by Les Blank
Film Workshop by Caryn Cline

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Garlic is as Good as Ten Mothers is a documentary. What expectations do you have about the form or style of the film based on that information?

What is suggested by the film's title about the filmmaker's purpose?

The film opens with two scenes in which the subjects wait for a signal from somebody off screen (probably the director) before they begin their activities--crushing a clove of garlic and singing a song about garlic. Films are constructions, and the filmmaker, Les Blank, could have started each of these shots a little later, editing out these shot "heads" which reveal, and remind us of, the presence of the filmmaker. Why do you think he chose to leave these shots as they are in the film? (Later, we see the film sound recorder, with his gear, interviewing children on a playground.)

How would you describe the "production values" (the look and sound) of the film? Are they "high end"? (i.e., do they indicate a big budget?) or "low end"? Do the production values influence your thinking about or engagement with the film? In what way?

How is the film organized? Is there a linear narrative to it? Does it follow a process in a straightforward manner? Blank chose not to provide a "voice over" narration, but rather to rely on interviews. Why do you think the filmmaker chose to construct the film in this way?

Blank uses music throughout the film. What types of music are used? What are the different ways that music is used in the film? Blank also uses text and graphics in the film. What information is communicated in these forms?

What aspects of "garlic culture" does Blank explore in this film? Enumerate as many as you can, and then think about why he chose to include them. Why do you think the sequence about the growing and

packing of garlic for consumption is positioned toward the end of the film?

What is Blank's purpose in making a film about garlic? Is Blank's film an "ethnobotany" of garlic? What larger themes are suggested in the film?