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FRONTLINE **(TVS)** **STORYVILLE** **CINEMA OUTLET**

THE INTERRUPTERS

1. Watch the documentary, *The Interrupters*.
2. After viewing the documentary, complete the following:

How did you feel after watching the film? Explain.

Based on the content of the documentary, fill in the blank in the following statement:

Life is _____ than fiction.

Write why.

3. Read the following review and answer the questions.

The Interrupters: Standing up to the deadly disease of assault

Liam Lacey

The Globe and Mail

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Stuffed toy animals, flowers and empty liquor bottles decorate the street corners where children and young men have been killed on Chicago city streets in Steve James's latest documentary, *The Interrupters*. How did murder become an event so common it has led to its own funeral rituals?

The Interrupters returns to those same Chicago streets, but this time focuses on a single problem: violence, not as a symptom but a cause of social disintegration. That's the theory of Dr. Gary Slutkin, an epidemiologist who travelled the world for the World Health Organization. On returning to Chicago, he saw the city's homicide rate as a public-health issue, like an infectious disease. Slutkin is behind the organization CeaseFire, which employs former gang members, called "violence interrupters," to work in the most crime-prone districts of the city to intervene in disputes before they turn lethal.

James's movie was inspired by New York Times magazine article by Alex Kotlowitz (who serves with James as the film's co-producer) but the aim here is more inspirational than conventionally journalistic. We're offered no other theories about violence to contrast with Slutkin's disease analogy. The film does not mention that Chicago homicide rates have been dropping since the early nineties, nor does it credit the Chicago police force's updated crime-prevention methods in the last decade.

Where James's film excels is as direct experiential cinema – without narration, onscreen interviews or acknowledgment of the presence of the camera – it is an intensely dramatic window into a world. CeaseFire's field general, Tio Hardiman, a former addict who ended up getting a masters degree, provides the background and introduces the film's three heroes – which seems the appropriate word for people who repeatedly risk their lives to stop the cycle of carnage. We follow them over the course of four seasons, marked by some successes, and more bitter funerals and memorials of stuffed toys and empty bottles.

The most indelible of these is Ameena Matthews, a small, fierce woman who doles out righteous outrage and empathy with equal fervour. The daughter of a gang leader, who ran with boy gangs herself, she is now a mother of four, married to a Muslim cleric. We see her, dressed in a black robe and head scarf, as she confronts a group of angry young men and reduces them to head-nodding agreement.

We also see the soft-spoken Ricardo “Cobe” Williams (whose wife describes him as a “nerd”) gently but relentlessly calming a drunken man who is holding a whisky bottle in his hand and clutching a pistol in his belt. The third “interrupter,” Eddie Bocanegra, who ran with the Latin gangs, is a quiet part-time artist on a path of lifelong atonement for a murder he committed in his youth.

Redemption, not crime, is the real theme here, for this handful of courageous men and women who have rescued their own lives, and just possibly may help save the blighted neighbourhoods in which they labour.

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1. What is the difference between a *cause* of social disintegration and a *symptom*?

2. If you bring in a epidemiologist to study the violence, what are you equating violence with?

3. What makes the documentary an “intensely dramatic window into a world”?

4. What does *carnage* mean?

5. What does *inedible* mean?

6. What does “blighted neighbourhoods” mean?

7. Did the film, *The Interrupters*, in your opinion, live up to the praise in the review? Explain.
