

# UC Berkeley

## Recent Work

**Title**

Beacon

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**Author**

Krieger, Isara

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## BEACON

VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
Boston establishing shot		Nat sot
c/u school busses		Nat sot
Beacon hallway		music
Beacon c/u office photos		DAVID: "This is life changing. When I say life changing I don't think people really understand that.
c/u kids working		You start to see, hey there are more opportunities for me to go out and get. There's more than being in Massachusetts, than being in Roxbury. There's a different world out here, than I am used to, than I have been told about my whole life.
c/d David, ID		I can't thank you guys enough.
TEXT on Screen		Beacon Academy recruits promising students from under-performing middle schools in Greater Boston  The purpose – an extra year of instruction before applying to private high schools
Makai on train		"Three trains. Two hours"
Makai on train		First I take the commuter rail, then I take the green line then I take the red line."
Makai on train		I hated Beacon. You can't love something that's hard at first.
Mervan interview at Beacon		"the purpose is to get kids ready for much more competitive school than they're used to."
Kids working in class. Angelica		"My mom always wanted me to do everything she couldn't. I'm the first in my family to finish middle-school."
Stalin, to		"I have a 2 yr old sister. If I do this correctly and create a successful path for myself I want her to look at me as a role model.
Pan to Stephanie		My parents didn't have a great education so I know that I have to do better
Danny		When you come to Beacon, everything hits you. It's like woah, I never learned that back in public school.
Outside classroom		Nat sot
Mr. Nett addressing class		So tomorrow you will have a vocab quiz. Nat sot class responding
c/u Meleah		I definitely feel like my old relationship with my friends is almost gone. Like we're hanging on by a thread. Their school assigns like omg we have one packet of hw a day and its in humanities, and I'm like oh boo hoo we have 5 packets a day, and we have to study and read and vocab and find a cure for

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
		cancer. All due tomorrow.
Kids in class, Exavion		Exavion VO "You'll be afraid to say something funny or something, because most of the kids have better grades than me,
Exavion interview		so I don't say much to them."
Exavion in class		
Makai interview		Vocab quiz. We had it today. Ugh it was different than we usually have, we usually have 20 questions. But this one was 3. I got the last one wrong. It was, here I'm gonna show you, I have my notecards right here.
Classroom shot, c/u of individual kids		Mervan: Who was I talking to the other day, someone who hadn't done their homework. That's like the basic expectation. Do you understand that, yet? That's what the world expects of you, come up just two or three pages short. You need to be selfish about this education business, competitive about these applications, more competitive.
End on Exavion close up		See, I don't wanna talk about that anymore. After the finals we took this week I don't think I have no chance of getting into no school right now.
Exavion in bedroom, leaving apartment		"Bye Nana"
Beacon c/u office photos		<a href="#">I live with my grandma because my mom lost me when I was younger.</a>
Commute to school		Not like lose me, just lost custody of me because, drug addict. My mom doesn't know who my dad is.
Hallway shot		I can't thank you guys enough.
c/u kids looking at computers and schools websites		Nat sot: I thought that school was the best school in the world. That's Rhode island, right?
Meleah c/u		Just seeing the opportunity I have and the schools I can go to
Mealah interview		Is just amazing
c/u kids looking		My top three schools are Willston North Hampton, Concord Academy, and Milton Academy
Exavion working on applications in hallway		Nat sot: Exavion and Danny chatting. "I like Dublin school which is in New Hampshire, I like that school. That's the only school that has a recording studio and I like rapping and making music."
c/u makai looking at apps		My top school right now is Tabor, but my grades need to be a lot better

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
Computer screen on BC High App		and my SSAT score needs to get picked up b/c it's a really good school.
c/u shoes at Clark's house		
Hallway Clark's house		Nat sot: Makai if you don't like anything you don't have to eat it. I usually like everything.
Eating dinner at table, c/u Makai, wide, Makai talking to coache's son		My mentor or my coach, at first we weren't that close, but getting to know him more and understand him more. He's a teacher at northeastern he's a professor.
Clark in kitchen from living room, Makai in doorway		Nat sot: Do you need any help? No we're okay thanks for asking. Why don't you go upstairs and finish studying?
c/u Makai and Clark with computer in study room		Last week the person I was closest to outside of beacon well he passed away last week.
Makai interview		I didn't get to finish my hw that much because I tried to stay out of the house and not think about it too much because my house is right here, and his is right here so even just walking out of the house you think about it and it just sucks.
c/u Makai and Clark with computer in study room		I just wanna get through it. Not like forget about it but its something for me to like live for and do good like for him.
Two shot of Makai and Clark		And Clark's been supportive and been someone to talk to about that.
Hallway shot at school		Kids nat sot
Exavion and classmate from back		Exavion VO: "I usually stay away from home actually. Because when I study I have to deal with my brothers."
Signing holiday cards		"I have four brothers, no 3 brothers one sister. Sister's in Wisconsin, well I don't know where my sisters at right now. My grandma's supposed to be getting custody of her sometime next year now, was supposed to be this year but I don't know what happened.
Exavion interview		And My mom died last year august 15 <sup>th</sup>
Kids signing cards		My grandma didn't even want to tell me, they told me she died they didn't tell me how.
Exavion interview		I hadn't seen her since be 9 years I as in 4 <sup>th</sup> grade b 5 years hadn't seen her in 5 years or hear her voice really
c/u card signing around the table		Nat sot
Down table shot kids having fun together		Nat sot, singing
MFA establishing sign		Nat sot

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
Exavion and calssmates sitting on bench in museum		Nat sot
Exavion and Kash looking at art in Makai looking at painting		Nat sot “Cuz Beacon’s stressful. Its fun though. Last year I would make up an excuse like uh my stomach hurts. I enjoy coming to school even though I know im going to have a lot of work and tests every day. The idea of missing school hasn’t even occurred to me
Makai and Kash looking at painting		Nat sot
Looking at painting		“it doesn’t even feel like school. It feels like a second home.
Cell phone footage on train to NYC		Kash on cellphone “45 mintues until we get to NY. I gotta look nice.”
Kids in group with Mervan		“You don’t get the chance to be in times square very often, look around, take some pictures.”
Kids taking photos on phone		Nat sot
Exavion clapping in circle		Nat sot, drums
Outside classroom		Nat sot: Okay, you need to look at your scores, then we’re gonna talk about it.
Mr. Nett addressing class		Nat sot, passing out sheets of paper
c/u Meleah		Meleah VO “The SSAT is a test that middle schoolers take to get into independent high schools”
Wides, c/u kids in classroom receiving test scores		Nat sot: Hey kids if you’re getting your scores and don’t know how to read them, the column that says percentage, that’s comparing you to all the other 8 <sup>th</sup> graders that took the test that day.
Makai Interview		“ Terrible. Terrible. I improved a lot but I improved 50 percent but it was so low that its still low I had a 17 like percentile. That’s terrible. That’s like a Z not even an F that’s a Z.
Classroom, c/u sad faces		“I see a lot of sad faces. There are exactly two of you with scores above the 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile. You’ll be competing with kids who will score, Mr. Nett in the 90 to 98 <sup>th</sup> ? Yeah.”
Mervan in class, kids reacting		You have one more chance. One more oppportunity to make a positive statement in January. Raise your hands if you half assed the homework. Its okay, today. I know how hard it is to get into these schools. Everyone is capable of improvement. You all are.
Meleah in class		I kinds of doubt myself I didn’t really realize that until I did applications.

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
Meleah interview		As far as the personal part goes I still have to work a little bit on participation.
Bluest Eye classroom shots		But with the Bluest Eye I've been thinking more deeply and trying to speak more in class.
Kids in class		Kash Nat sot: "I just realized whenever you see the perfect family, perfect suburban family or whatever I never see a black family.
c/u book cover, teacher, students		"what she's saying is she's had all this influence from larger white culture. This is a story about learning to read and learning to understand the world. Oh this is what a family is supposed to be. What happens if the books you're learning to read from show dick and jane, and don't show anyone else?"
Meleah		VO "it has to be one of my favorite books I've read ever."
Sawpit establishings		Meleah VO: "sawpit is an opportunity for us to get clothes not only for interviews but for next year when we're off at boarding school because some schools have dress codes."
c/u sawpit flier, Meleah shopping with coach		"Academically I'm probably going to be fine. But socially I might not be as fine. Bc I'm so used to being around people of color.
Meleah finding pink coat, c/u putting it on of buttons, her face		Even at gardner I was one of the only black students among many Hispanics and one white person but I feel like when I go off to private school im gonna feel like how that one white person felt.
Meleah interview		"Even though she was friends with everybody she was still the minority so sometimes people would be talking about certain things she knows she couldn't talk about b/c it would come off as being racist, even though she's just trying to fit in.
Meleah showing shoes to teacher		Nat sot: Oooh. did you try them on? Oh I missed it.
Meleah talking to camera, showing clothes		Oh, this beautiful skirt. I always wanted a pencil skirt and I thought I would find one here and I did, I'm so happy.
Meleah talking to camera		I don't go shopping that often. Yea, this is the first time in forever.
Estab of Meleah's apartment		<b>Title: Brighton, MA</b>
Meleah c/u of new shoes		Music starts
Meleah walking to car with her family		
Concord scene setting		<b>Title: Concord, MA</b>
Concord academy, girls directing		Nat sot: are you here for the open house? You're in the right

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
school visitors		place!
Meleah's family entering school gates		Meleah VO: "visiting schools kinda tells me what beacon really is. When I went to concord I had this feeling of home. If was different than I would've ever felt at public school.
Meleah interview		I was by myself and I was talking to the adults which is something I never do. And it was just amazing.
Mission Park establishing		Title: Mission Hill
Exavion trying to tie his tie.		Radio nat sot. "I forgot how to do my tie."
Exavion's grandma		Nat sot
c/u exavion, tie		
Exavion trying on suit		VO: "I know im gonna have problems in high school. We have these events with beacon, with alumni and they talk about the kind of problems they have because the boarding schools are predominantly white.
Exavion trying on sweater		"that's why not right now but on my way im gonna think of a solution."
Exavion tying tie in mirror		<b>But I think I'm one of those kids that can figure it out</b>
Exvion interview on screen, showing bracelet		Beacon motive, figure it out.
Trees outside moving car		Nat sot: "turn right for tabor academy." Tabor academy!
Makai and mom in car		"It's near like nothing youll see they like leave their bikes outside without them being locked. "don't get used to that and come back to Boston for the week.
Outside window, trees		Nat sot: Oh its like a little country.
Shot ahead of car, blue sky		The skyline looks like were driving up to water, doesn't it?
Two of them in car		"We are. We are? That's water right there. Oh Makai, youre going to love this.
Tabor buildings outside car		That's tabor. The dorms are over there.
Makai pointing out car		And that's their boathouse.
Establishig of tabor		Nat sot
Makai and going on tour		Nat sot: and this is the athletic center I mentioned before
		When we went to st. georges I saw how nice everything was. It was right on the water. It became clear to me. What you can get out of beacon if you put in the work.
Makai interview		"the last one I took I got a 63."
		Title: Notification day

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VIDEO	Time	AUDIO
Cell phone videos of kids receiving acceptance: Angelica		Nat sot
Danny acceptance		Nat sot
Teejay acceptance		Nat sot cheering
Exavion video		On phone with grandma, guess what? I got into Dublin today!
c/d David, ID		
Acquired videos from 1 <sup>st</sup> day Meleah		Nat sot: I want a high school that will help me and takes your passion no matter how big it is
Meleah interview		Title: Concord Academy, Concord MA Class of 2021
Makai		“right now it means a lot. I think in the future it’ll mean a lot more
Makai interview		<b>Title: St. Georges School Providence RI Class of 2021</b>
exavion		<b>Motivates me? My mom/ because I’m doing this for her and making her proud.</b>
Exavion interview		Silence: title card: Dublin School, Dublin NH Class of 2021
credits		

Beacon

A documentary film by Isara Krieger

## Introduction

Beacon is a 25-minute documentary film that tells the story of three students making their way through the school year at Beacon Academy, in Boston, MA. Beacon Academy is a 14-month program that accepts a class of 26 students who’ve just completed 8<sup>th</sup> grade in the Boston Public School system. Beacon’s mission is to push these disadvantaged students harder than they’ve ever been pushed before -- building them up culturally and academically -- so the students will not only be competitive applicants to the area’s top private and college-prep high schools but they will be motivated and confident enough to succeed in them and on.



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This is truly a life-changing year for the students at Beacon. They are leaving their past worlds behind, many of them speak of how easy or bad their last public schools were; how their friends there didn't intend to go to college or in some cases graduate high school; how they had to convince their parents to let them come to Beacon because their working-class families only saw attending this program as repeating a year instead of the life-long advantage it would give them (since these students are choosing to not continue to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in their expected public school system and instead take a year aside to then start 9<sup>th</sup> grade at a private school).

Everything the students experience in this year – having their speech corrected, having nice clothing for their high school interviews donated to them, being assigned a life coach who is a stable mentor in this new world for them – illustrates what it takes to bridge the disadvantaged world from which they come and the privileged world of success to which they aspire.

**Act I** - Meeting the students and laying out their struggles.

The film begins with scenes from a bustling morning commute, highlighting the different methods by which people get to school in the city -- public school busses, city trains and busses, and private cars. I might include at this point a general line or two of text on screen about Boston's number of colleges compared with its public high school graduation rates. Then images shift to the places people are commuting to – the large private school campuses and the urban public school setting.

We see the three characters, Meleah, Makai and Stalin for the first time ending their commutes and going into Beacon Academy. Through on screen interviews, they each introduce themselves and provide a little bit of background about the schools they went to before and why they came to Beacon. Meleah says her past school was “okay;” that she was smartest in her class and she felt different from all of her classmates because “They’re just in it to pass school not to go to college or have a future and that breaks my heart a little bit,” she says.

Makai tells us about his dream high school but says he needs to raise his grades and test scores or he’s not going to get in. He says Beacon has been very hard because he’s used to having 20 minutes of homework a night.

Stalin says he came to Beacon because he wants to have a better life than his mom. He wants to go to a good high school and then to college so he can be a role model for his 2-year-old sister.

Meleah says she wants to go to Harvard and she wants to be a journalist. She says she wants a high school that would feel like family because she plans on boarding there. She says going to a private high school is going to be really hard socially, and tells us about the one white girl at her old middle school who, despite

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trying to fit in, just couldn't talk about everything the others talked about. "I'm going to be like that one white girl," Meleah says.

I ask Makai why Beacon has been so hard and he says it's hard to focus on school because his best friend just passed away.

Meleah talks about having to convince her mom that coming to Beacon was a good idea. "I just told her about how I can have this alternative life to just being in public school. And she was just like hm okay if you want to do that. But now that I'm actually here she can actually understand that it's not just 8<sup>th</sup> grade again it's so many more things, it's so much more effort I have to put in my work, it's a lot."

I ask Stalin why Mr. Osborne (the director of the school) was upset with him, and he tells me it's because he wasn't being open-minded about giving his life coach a chance. This shows the characters beginning to get over barriers they might have built up towards things they haven't been exposed to so far in life, like a mentor who believes in them.

## **Act II** – Get to know Beacon see how it's building each character up.

In this act we see the characters more at school and get a sense for the school and teachers. We see Meleah taking notes voluntarily on the white board for the class, and highlights and underlines all the books they read in English. We see the kids interact with teachers and with each other in hallways.

We sit in on a meeting of the life coaches as they discuss what it was like taking the students to the private schools for their first interviews. How some of the schools seemed ill-prepared to host kids from these backgrounds. These other voices speak to the struggles the kids will have as they face these new worlds.

There is a scene of the clothing drive where the kids shop through racks of expensive donated clothing as their life coaches help them pick out things to wear for their interviews coming up.

We are there the day the second round of SSAT test scores come back and the teachers are not happy about the results. They meet with students and ask them if they are aware of the opportunity they have at Beacon and ask why they're not paying attention during test prep classes. Only two kids scored higher than the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. "You'll be competing with students in the 98<sup>th</sup> percentile," one teacher explains. "Should we have lower expectations for you because you're low-income students?"

Then we see a meeting with teachers about how frustrated they are with certain students not trying hard enough. They discuss the personal lives of many students and if they think they have what it takes to try harder. We see that the teachers really act as psychologists evaluating all elements of each student's well being.

We move back to on-screen interviews with the characters. Stalin tells a story about a recent fight with his mom. His mom works in New York City and is rarely home. On his application to Beacon he wrote that he

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lived alone. When she found out she was so angry that she told him he was “a little bit dead to her.” Stalin tears up as he says this, knowing that she meant it. He also tears up as he says that even though he apologized to her, he felt guilty that his words came from Mr. Osborne and not from himself.

In an on-screen interview, Makai tells that he doesn’t want to go to a school that’s predominantly white, though he knows many – or all – of the private schools he’s applying to are not diverse. When touring one school, he tells us, he didn’t even see one person of color. He says their diversity is 17%. “That’s my SSAT score,” he says, “That’s not good.”

The end of this act will try to reach a point of tension with each character. We’ll maybe see each of the three kids get home from school at night and see the support they do or do not have there. Maybe we will see Meleah as she tries to contact her old friend who she’s slipping away from. Meleah mentioned an “inspiration wall” she keeps at home so I’d like to show her explaining this. We might see Stalin home alone without his mom. We see Makai arrive home very late at night when the other kids have gone to bed. I also plan to incorporate some iPhone footage that the kids will have shot themselves narrating a day in their lives. This might be a good place for it, but I’m not sure yet.

### **Act III**

We see the teachers working hard with students to get the final elements of their high school applications together. We might hear the characters describe what they’re writing about in their application essays and hear about how their interviews have gone and what their impressions are of the private schools they visit. We will see the nervous energy as they hit submit on their applications to the schools they really want to go to.

Here we might have voice over from an interview with Mr. Osborne about the mission of the school. Something I like that he’s said before: As a black man with a young son of his own it’s painful to see his son grow up and discover racism and the struggles he’ll face as a black man himself. He talks about how Beacon Academy graduates so many successful black and minority kids and it’s the photos of these amazing kids that the country really needs to see strewn across the internet instead of endless photos of black people being killed and accused.

We see the students get their letters in the mail from the high school schools and their reactions as they do or do not get into their dream schools. Will show some sort of resolve for each of them, maybe Stalin having support from his mom, Makai describing how he will live for his lost friend, and Meleah will talk about how she’ll plan to still connect with her old friends even though she’s changed so much.

The film will end with clips that Mr. Osborne shot at the beginning of the school year, asking the kids what they hoped for during the course of this year. The clips will run back-to-back, beginning with the

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Meleah's, Makai's and Stalin's, then their classmates' will continue on. I might cut the clips shorter and shorter so as to include the whole class's. This will create the feeling that while we only got to know 3 of the students well, there are more in this school and many more like them across the city and country. The ending clips will be shortened to one-word bites, i.e. "change," "future," "hope."

#### SOURCE LIST:

#### **Beacon Academy:**

#### **Source/character List**

#### **Beacon Academy:**

**Address:** 477 Longwood Ave, Boston, MA 02215

**Phone:** [\(617\) 423-2266](tel:6174232266)

Mervan Osborne, Director  
617 653-7569

Cindy Laba, Founder  
617 233-3022

Marsha Fienberg, Founder

#### **Characters:**

(can provide phone numbers if needed)

Makai Murray (under 18), and mother

Meleah Neely (under 18), and mother

Exavion Clarvou (under 18), and grandmother

#### **Tuition Fact Check:**

Tabor Academy Admissions Office

**Address:** 232 Front St, Marion, MA 02738

**Phone:** [\(508\) 748-2000](tel:5087482000)

Concord Academy Main office

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**Address:** 166 Main St, Concord, MA 01742

**Phone:** [\(978\) 402-2200](tel:(978)402-2200)