

# Maestra

**A Documentary Film by Catherine Murphy**  
**The Literacy Project in collaboration with ICAIC**

The Cuban Literacy Campaign in 1961 was one of the farthest-reaching and most successful literacy campaigns to date, one of the pinnacle moments in the social history of the Americas. The documentary *Maestra* tells the story of the campaign through personal stories of women literacy workers who went to the mountains and valleys across the island to teach—and found themselves deeply transformed in the process.

Over half of the newly literate adults were women. Many of them learned to read the alphabet—and write their own names—for the first time. And for the young women from the cities who left their homes and went to the mountains to teach, the campaign remains one of the most important experiences of their lives. It was the first time in Cuban history that thousands of young women broke free from many key limitations that they faced as women and went out on their own. Many said it was the first time they felt “independent, capable, and free.”



Photo courtesy of Liborio Noval

The literacy campaign workers are now in their 60s, 70s and 80s. They are living treasures and their stories must be documented and shared. Exploring this moment through oral testimonies, this documentary explores the connections between national liberation and personal liberation, and the importance of empowering women and girls. Based in living history, *Maestra* also aims to spark contemporary political dialogue, reflection, and strategies for positive social change.

*"In an age when so many teenagers—especially girls—are afflicted with low self-esteem, the Literacy Project shows how a whole generation of Cuban youth blossomed by venturing out to the countryside to spread the gift of literacy. Proving the old adage that it is better to give than receive, this film shows how a government mission to help the poorest lifts the entire society to new heights. Watch [Maestra] and rejoice."*

Medea Benjamin, Founder, Code Pink/Women for Peace, and Global Exchange; National Advisory Board, US Women and Cuba Collaboration

*"This film brought tears to my eyes. Thank you. It is beautiful."*

Alice Walker, Writer and Peacemaker, Author of *The Color Purple*

*"Este proyecto de Catherine Murphy rescata la más importante experiencia de alfabetización de toda la historia de las Américas. Sus protagonistas tienen la palabra. Son ellos quienes cuentan su experiencia, y por boca de cada uno de ellos habla una formidable aventura colectiva. Catherine ha dedicado a esta tarea su tiempo, su energía y su talento. El resultado está a la altura del desafío."*

Eduardo Galeano, Uruguayan Writer, Journalist, Political Analyst, Author of *The Open Veins of Latin America* and *Memories of Fire*

Contact Information:

[www.theliteracyproject.org](http://www.theliteracyproject.org)

[info@theliteracyproject.org](mailto:info@theliteracyproject.org)

**UPCOMING US PREMIERES FEATURING THE MAESTRA US FILM & SPEAKING TOUR ORGANIZED BY THE US WOMEN AND CUBA COLLABORATION IN SPRING, 2011. DETAILS ON OUR WEB SITE [WWW.WOMENANDCUBA.ORG](http://WWW.WOMENANDCUBA.ORG)**