What Would Wakanda Do?

Teaching Development Economics and International Trade Through Black Panther

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Diversifying Economics Teaching

Bounty Hunters Can Teach Microeconomics: Illustrations from Netflix's Cowboy Bebop

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Amel Ben Abdesslem & Jul

Abstract

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BREAKING DOWN THE LANGUAGE BARRIER: USING POP CULTURE FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE TO TEACH MICROECONOMICS

Wayne Geerling
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G. Dirk Mateer
Florencia Gabriele

Keywords: inclusive teaching, diversity, media, teaching economics

Abstract

Economic educators have been teaching with pop culture for decades, but the idea of using foreign-language teaching resources to create a more inclusive and diverse classroom has only recently been taken up. This paper builds on the work of Wooten et al. (2020), who have shown how K-pop can be integrated into an English-language classroom. We expand on that work by compiling a set of 11 teaching guides using material from 11 different countries that demonstrate economic concepts commonly taught in a principles of microeconomics course. Al-Bahrani (2020) has called on educators to take a deliberate approach to diversifying their lecture material. It is our hope that, with broadly diverse and inclusive media will be ubiquitous when students are introduced to economics.

PDF

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Section
Articles

Using Kollywood

Feler Bose

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PDF

Abstract

Students are exposed to a variety of sources of information and entertainment during their undergradu
presents opportunities since students are interacting with ideas and concepts in different settings. One
international movies. Economic development is focused on developing countries; hence, when movies
countries are used in the classroom, they portray reality more vividly. This helps students learn about t
challenges confronting such countries. This paper looks at international movies in an economic develop
specifically Kollywood movies. The instructor was involved in the choice of Kollywood movies and provi
one.

Game Theory, Economics, and Business

Lessons from HBO's Succ

Economists are increasingly using pop culture clips to suppleme
Succession offers a unique perspective by following a family wh
and their complex business decisions. In this paper, we highligh
that can be taught using the show. W

JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS TEACHING

Using Squid Game to Teach Game Theory

This paper uses Netflix's dystopian Korean-language drama series *Squid Game* (2021) to illustrate an active learning technique to support the teaching of game theory in undergraduate courses.

Teaching Economics with Parks and Recreation

ing guides that can be used by economic educators to teach topics as
gaps to government bailouts. Each guide is based on a variety of scenes
n show Parks and Recreation, which are freely available to educators and
guide is framed around student-to-student discussion to increase active
om.

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†Virginia Tech ‡University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

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of the firm. By embedding abstract concepts in a rich na
enhances student engagement, deepens conceptual
fictional narratives can serve as powerful tools for rigo

Otávio Detoni

†Federal University of São Joã

USING K-POP TO TEACH INDIFFERENCE CURVE ANALYSIS, BEHAVIORAL ECONOMICS AND GAME THEORY

Wayne Geerling
Kristofer Nagy
Elaine Rhee
Jadrian Wooten

Keywords: Inclusive teaching, media, music, teaching economics, game theory, behavioral economics, indifference curves

Abstract

Economic educators have been teaching with pop culture for decades, but until recently the focus was on English-based media. In this paper, we build on the work of Wooten et al. (2021b), who show how K-pop can be integrated into the principles-level curriculum. We develop three teaching guides that can be used to teach aspects of behavioral economics, game theory and indifference curve analysis – topics which are taught at the end of most principles-level courses but are also standalone upper-level courses. The three artists chosen – BTS, BLACKPINK and TWICE – have huge global followings. We hope this paper will contribute to the library of diverse and inclusive teaching resources while helping to address the deficit of resources available to instructors of upper-level courses.

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Section
Articles

i language films to teach

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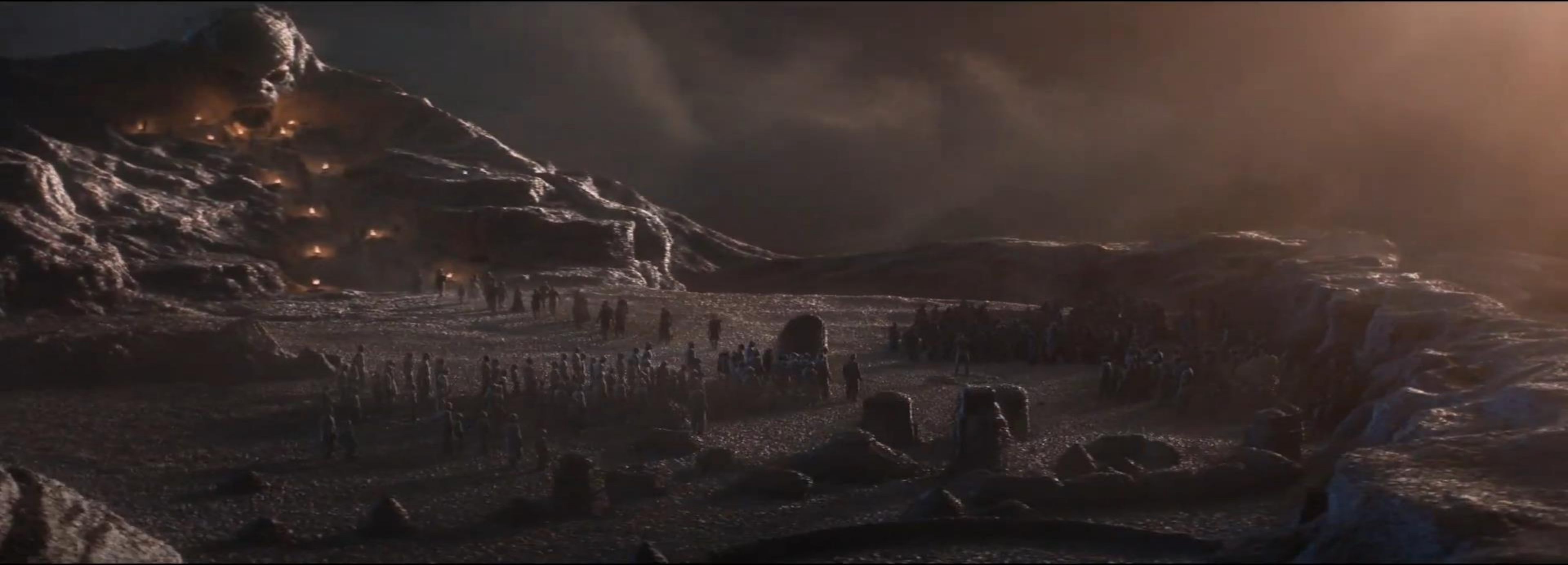
Tools Share

e since the start of this century but until recently, the focus was
he increasing internationalisation of higher education,
media sources, recognising the diverse and ever-changing
bdesslem and Picault (2023a, 2023b), who use Netflix Originals
. This article represents the first step towards the inclusion of
curriculum. Bollywood films are famous for elaborate song-
orylines. Leveraging popular culture through mediums like
in ways that 'chalk and talk' lectures cannot. We present a
films to teach foundation-level concepts. We hope that over
turally diverse media from Bollywood in their teaching.

Origins of Wakanda



(See Clip 1 in Appendix Files)

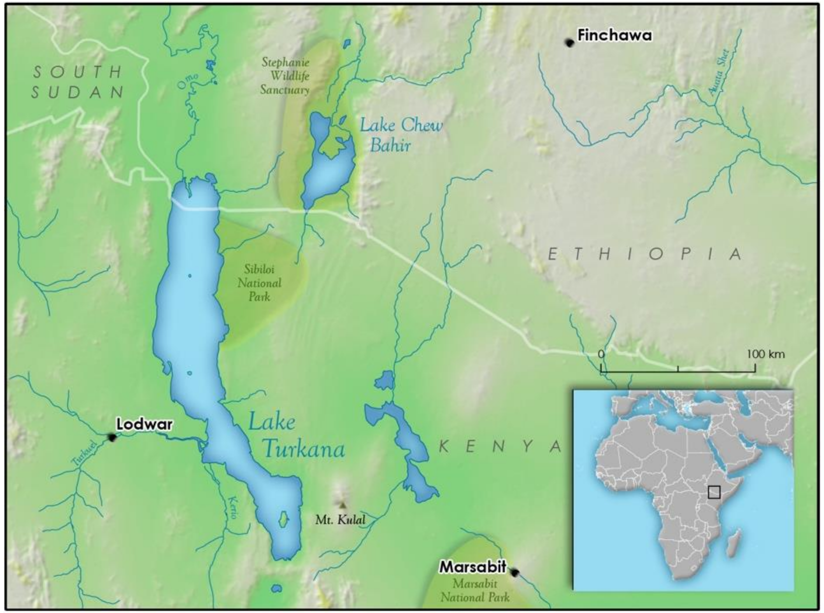
Why Wakanda

- Fictional African nation located in East Africa; completely in isolation
  - 5 tribes live (somewhat) in harmony
  - Built around vibranium
  - Ryan Coogler's Wakanda is based on Kingdom of Lesotho

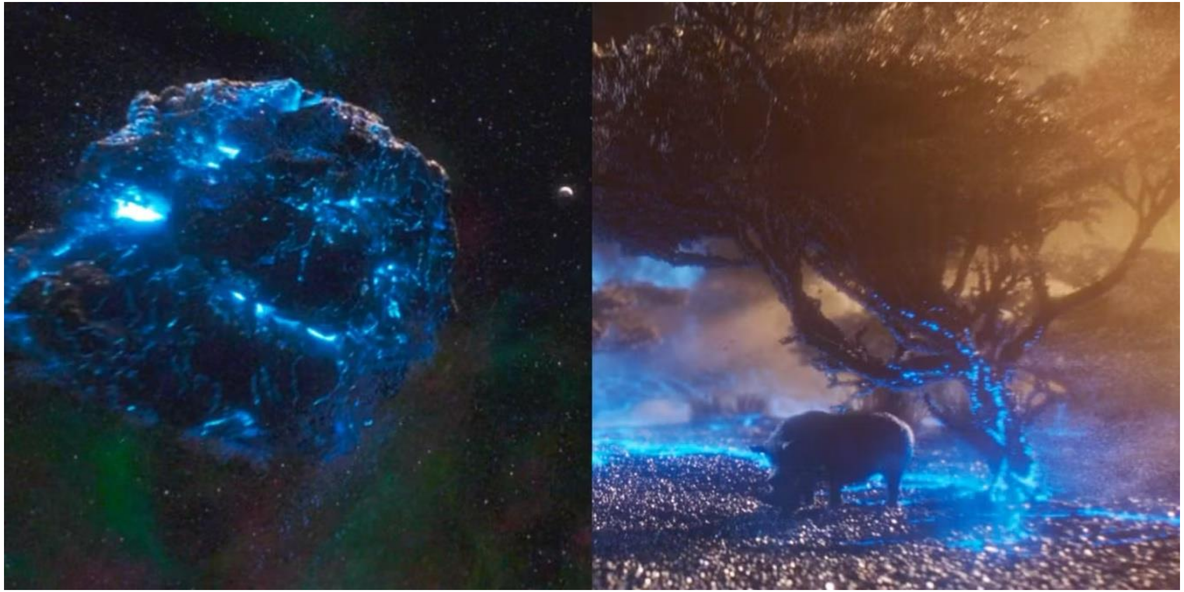
- *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022)
  - New world player: Talokan
  - Also have vibranium, unknown to Wakanda

- Grossed over $2 billion

- Shifts narrative from Western and Eurocentric views on how the Global South looks like.



Wakanda Economics



International Trade Economics: Autarky & Trade

Development Economics: The Role of Institutions in Development

Concept 1: Autarky & Trade

Wakanda's near-perfect **autarky**:

- No exports, no imports, everything homemade.
- Absolute and comparative advantage in vibranium.

Cost	Benefit
• Had to invent almost everything itself. • No efficiency gains from specialization	• Avoided colonization, resource exploitation, and foreign interference. • No exposure to external shocks.

Wakanda at the Crossroads

Should Wakanda remain isolated or integrate into the global economy?

- Apply international trade theory (Ricardian/H-O Models)
- Analyze Wakanda's decision to remain a closed economy vs. engage in international trade.
- Activity involves role-play simulations.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Explain the economic implications of autarky, trade openness, and globalization using Wakanda's transition

- Apply theories of comparative advantage and strategic trade to vibranium and technology
- Analyze how resource abundance generates prosperity and vulnerability (resource curse)
- Assess competing policy perspectives: isolationism vs. openness vs. strategic trade

King T'Challa's UN Speech (Black Panther)

(See Clip 2 in Appendix Files)

Activity Structure: Six Phases

Phase 1: The Clip (~5 mins)

Watch the United Nation's scene.

Phase 2: Group Assignment ~5 mins

Divide the class into 5 delegations

Each assigned a fictional/real-world nation with a defined economic profile

Delegation	Profile	Trade Interests
Wakanda	Vibranium-rich, technologically advanced, wary of exploitation	Wants technology transfer agreements, not raw exports
Talokan	Underwater vibranium deposits, militarily strong, deeply isolationist	Wants sovereignty guarantees before any trade deal
United States	Technologically advanced, large consumer market	Wants raw vibranium access or licensing agreements
A Sub-Saharan African Nation	Agriculture-rich, low capital, high labor force	Wants development aid + manufacturing investment
A Multinational Corporation	Capital-rich, seeks vibranium mining rights	Offers technology, but wants long-term extraction contracts

Activity Structure: Six Phases

Phase 3: Bilateral Negotiations (~10 mins)

- Each delegation negotiates bilaterally with one other group.
- They must propose a trade deal that includes:
  - what they offer
  - what they want
  - one condition

Phase 4: Decisions and Voting (~10 mins)

- All delegations come together in a plenary.
- A student-elected chair (or the instructor) facilitates.
- Each group first presents their deal and seeks a multilateral agreement or coalition.
- Disagreements and power dynamics will emerge organically.
- Conduct a voting to reach a resolution.

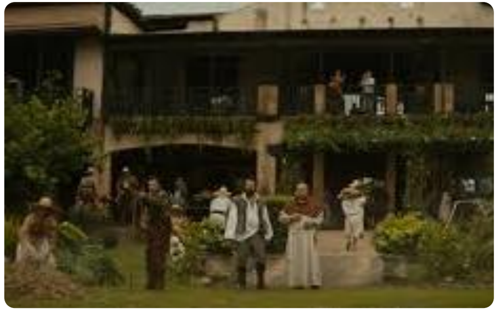
Activity Structure: Six Phases

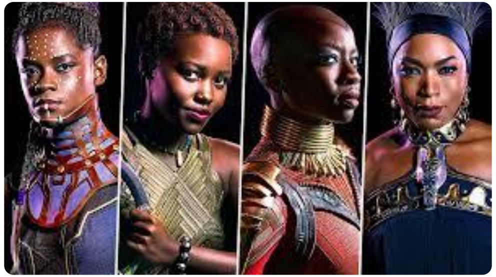
Phase 5: Debrief and Class Discussion (~10 mins)

- Which delegation had the most bargaining power? Why?
- Did Wakanda or Talokan face a "resource curse" scenario during negotiations? How did they protect against it?
- What real-world institutions (WTO, IMF) play the role of the summit chair?
- T'Challa chose to open Wakanda at the end of BP. In WF, that decision brought conflict. What does this tell us about the political economy of trade openness?

Phase 6: Short Reflection Paper (250-300 words)

- Using one trade theory from class, evaluate Wakanda's decision to transition from autarky to open trade.
- What would you have advised T'Challa?





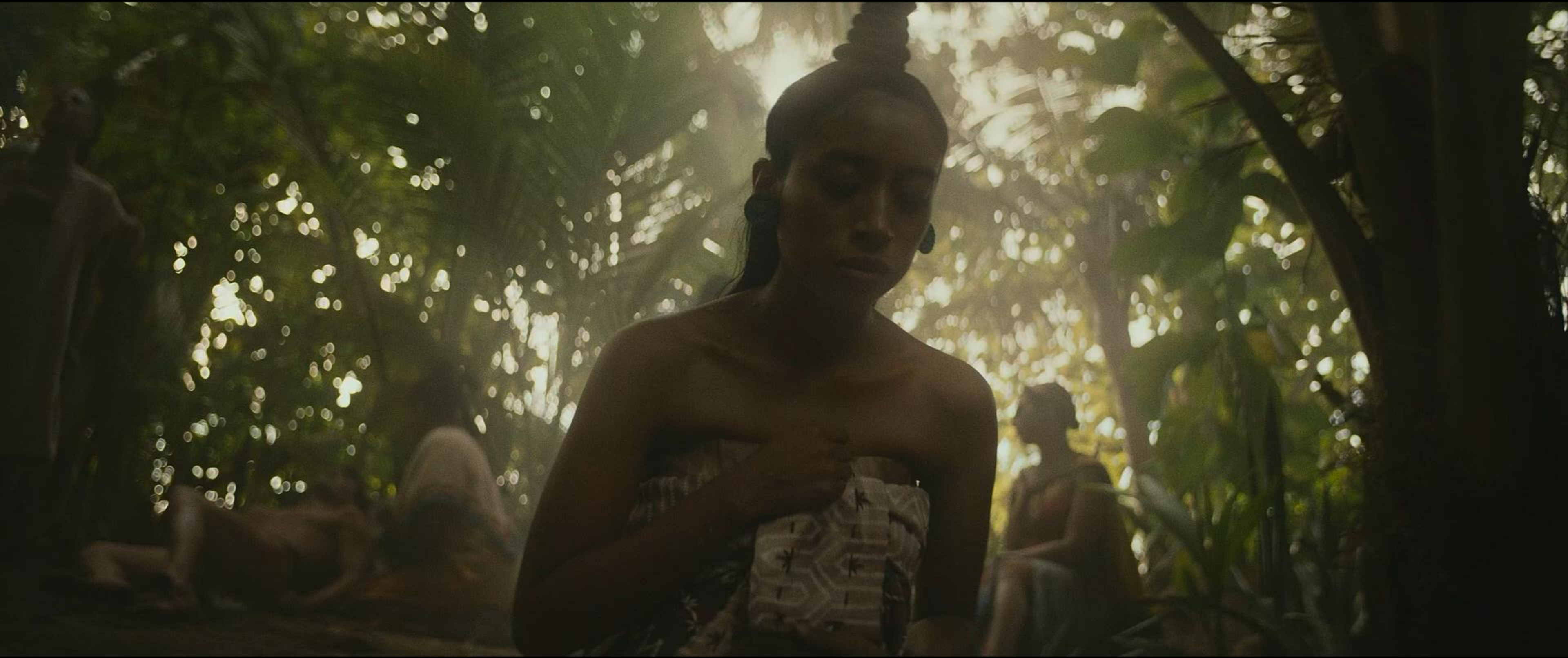
CONCEPT 2:
THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN DEVELOPMENT

Three Histories, One Mechanism

Why are some nations poor vs. some nations rich?

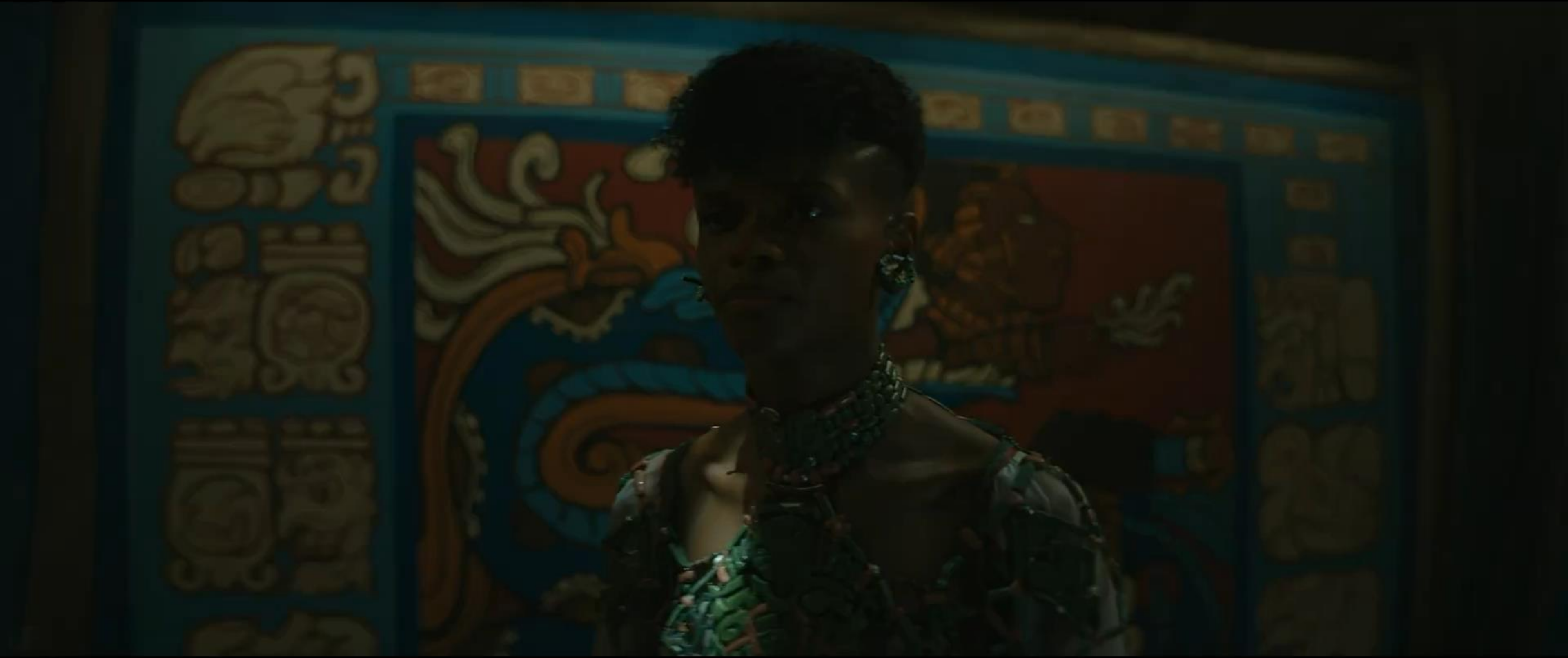
Geography? Institutions? Culture? History?

Namor's Origin Story (Black Panther: Wakanda Forever)



(See Clip 3 details in Appendix Files)

Namor's Origin Story (Black Panther: Wakanda Forever)



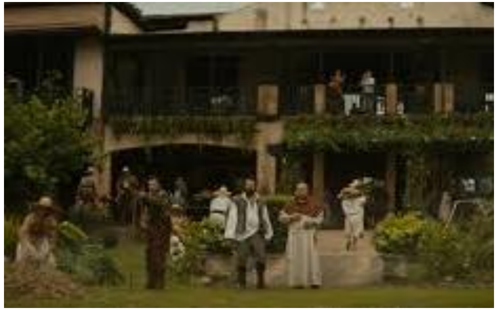
(See Clip 3 details in Appendix Files)

Three Histories, One Mechanism

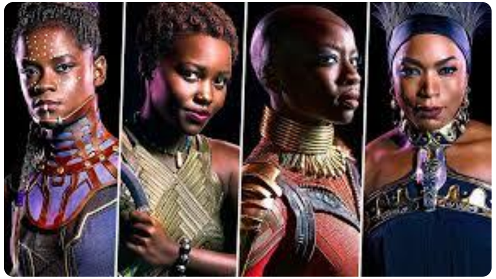
Why are some nations poor vs. some nations rich?

Geography? Institutions? Culture? History?

Surface Mayans



Wakandans (counterfactual)



Talokans (escaped)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES
DEVELOPMENT ECONOMICS

- Discuss how colonial history, historical path dependence, and external intervention shape long-run outcomes
  - Examine the link between institutions resource extraction, and development
  - Understand institutional persistence: extractive vs. inclusive institutions
  - Connect fictional narratives to formal economic models and real-world economic issues
  - Evaluate causal methods between historical events and long-term economic development

Activity Structure

- Phase 1: The Clip and the Puzzle (~5-10 minutes)
  - Watch Namor's origin story.
  - Map three groups
    - Those who escaped colonization effects fully
    - Those who didn’t
    - Those who were never colonized
- Phase 2: Three-way comparison (~15 minutes)
  - Students work in pairs comparing three population groups.

Student Handout

	Talokan Ancestors	Surface Maya	Wakanda
At contact (disease, mortality)			
What colonizers were able to do			
Institutions that emerged after			
Long-run outcomes			

Discussion Questions (Phase 3)

Question 1

What explains the difference between the Talokanil ancestors who escaped and the Maya who remained on the surface?

Question 2 (harder)

What explains the difference between the Maya on the surface today and the Wakandans today, centuries after the original contact?

Optional (Econometrics)

What specific empirical strategy would you use to evaluate long-term development outcomes between the three nation states?

The Counterfactual Question

If the *conquistadors* had reached Wakanda in 1571 instead of the Yucátan, what would Wakanda look like today?

OR

If the *conquistadors* had not reached Yucátan in 1571, what would Yucátan look like today?

Concept Mapping to Literature: Phase 4

Student Observation	Concept	Suggested Readings
Smallpox killed many of Namor's ancestors	Disease environment, settler mortality	Acemoglu et al. (2001)
Mayans who couldn't escape	Extractive vs. inclusive institutions	Acemoglu et al. (2002)
Namor returns generations later	Institutional persistence; colonial-era arrangements	Acemoglu et al. (2002); Nunn (2009); Dell (2010)
Namor doesn't trust surface world	Cultural persistence, origins of mistrust	Nunn and Wantchekon (2011)
Wakanda as a multi-ethnic unified unit, no civil conflict	Ethnic Fractionalization; provision of public goods	Easterly & Levine (1997); Alesina et al. (1999); Michalopoulous & Papaioannou (2016)

Other Extensions

- The Resource Curse
  "Through which of the resource-curse channels was Wakanda most at risk, and which institutional features insulated it?"

- Foreign Aid
  "In the debate between Sachs and Easterly, which development model is Wakanda implicitly endorsing?"

- Technology Transfer
  "Is Shuri's outreach center best understood as foreign aid, FDI, or public good provision? Does the distinction matter?"

- See associated clips in the appendix files

Summary

- Development and trade econ classes can use Black Panther & Wakanda Forever to teach core concepts.

- Allows a more nuanced discussion on the economic differences between the Global South and the Global North.

- Furthers the goal of diversifying materials used not just in principles classes, but also in upper-level courses.