

United States History through Film

Course Syllabus

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Since Thomas Edison patented America's first motion picture camera in 1891, telling America's history through film has become a large part of our culture. For many people watching a Hollywood film on America is their only way of getting to know her history (no matter how accurate the film). The films we will be watching for this class are Hollywood films rather than documentaries so they are reenactments of historical events not a documentary record of events. These Hollywood films may present content in four possible ways:

1. **As a Factual Record:** Film is used to dramatize events.
2. **To Convey Atmosphere:** The use of fiction to convey a sense of past – lifestyles, values, and beliefs.
3. **Analogy:** An historical events is used to point out or explain contemporary motives or actions, particularly when the event is controversial.
4. **A lesson in Historiography:** Because the dramatic form used in films requires consistent and relatively simple motivational interpretations, students can often learn how the time period in which the film was made interpreted historical personalities and events.

This class is not a eat popcorn and watch movie class. The goal of this class is learn American History through watching movies. Each film will consist of 6 to 8 days of class work. This class work will be divided into three different areas. The first area will be the introduction. At this point we will introduce the time period and what the film is about. The second area will be the actual watching of the movie with discussion. The third and final area will be the post work which may include discussion questions, work sheets, film reviews and/or essays. This class will be a writing and research intensive class. Being gone for the actual watching of the film will cause problems so it will have to be made up.

A true history of America contains stories of courage, leadership, innovation and triumph. These stories are marred with war, slavery, deceit and overall treachery. Thus when choosing from thousands of different films many good ones such as the Last of the Mohicans, The Patriot, Saving Private Ryan, The Right Stuff and Blackhawk Down had to be left out because of graphic violence, crude language and sexual innuendos which are deemed inappropriate for a public school setting. These 22 films were chosen because of their content as well as school friendliness. Unfortunately there may still be a few parts of the films with abusive language, unruly violence and innuendos. For that reason a permission slip must be signed before you can participate in class.

The following is a list of time periods and films we will watch this year. Time constraints may require one or two films to be dropped or a few more added.

Weeks 1 and 2 Students will learn how to do research and answer the following question: Can history be learned by watching

Hollywood films?

American Revolution

1776

Rated PG 166 minutes (1972)

Is a musical about the birth of America including the first congress and the Declaration of Independence

Expansion/Civil War/Westward Movement

The Alamo Rated PG-13 137 minutes (2004)

Tale of 200 men and the fight for Texas independence

Lincoln Rated PG-13 150 minutes (2013)

Story of President Lincoln during the Civil War

Gettysburg Rated PG 271 minutes (1993)

Story of the 1863 Civil War Battle of Gettysburg

(1990)

Dances with Wolves Rated PG-13 185 minutes

in the 1870

Story of a white soldier who posts

Lakota

Dakotas and becomes friends with the

Sioux

Burying My Heart at Wounded Knee

(2007)

Little Big Horn

No Rating 131 minutes

Story of the Sioux Nation from
to Wounded Knee

Early 1900s through World War 1

(2005)

Francis Oiumet

Greatest Game Ever Played Rated PG 120 minutes

Story of 1913 US Open –

(1941)

from pacifist

Sgt. York

No Rating 134 minutes

Story of Alvin York, who went
to WWI hero

1920's and Depression

(1957)

transatlantic

Spirit of St. Louis

No Rating 135 minutes

Story of Charles Lindbergh
flight

World War II/Post War Time Period

(1970) *Tora! Tora! Tora!* Rated G 144 minutes
attack on Pearl Harbor
Movie based upon the Japanese

(1992) *A League of Their Own* Rated PG 128 minutes
American Girl
created during World War 2
Movie based on the All-Professional Baseball League

Tuskegee
Airman Rated PG-13
114 minutes (2001)
the color Story of black fliers who broke
World barrier in the U.S. Air Force during
War 2

The life story of Jackie Robinson and the color breaking within Major League Baseball and the United States

Communism and American Society

October Sky

Rated PG 108 minutes (1999)

quest at

Story of Homer H. Hickham Jr. and his

Rocketry

Murder in the Heartland

NR 180

minutes (1993)

Starkweather

Story of Charles

Civil Rights/1960s

Ghosts of Mississippi

Rated PG-13 131 minutes

(2002)

Evers and

Story of the Murder of Medgar

30 years of failed justice

1960s/1970s

Green Berets

Rated G 142 minutes (1968)

Story of Vietnam heroes

We Are Marshall Rated PG 131 minutes (2006)

Story of how the University of Marshall

overcame

a tragedy

Apollo 13

Rated PG 140 minutes (1995)

The story of tragedy to triumph of the Apollo 13
space craft

Secretariat

Rated PG 123 minutes (2010)

Story of Penny Chenery Tweedy and the Triple
Crown

1970's and 1980's

Miracle

Rated PG 136 minutes (2004)

Movie based on the Miracle on Ice; the 1980 U.S.
Hockey gold medal team

21st Century

Flight 93

Rated PG-13 89 minutes (2006)

Story of the forth plane hijacked on Sept

11, 2001