American History through Film and Music
Course Curriculum

Unit 1: Introduction to Film Studies

Analyze how films reflect society and are films a valid historical source?

**Essential Questions:**
1. Why is it important to study Hollywood’s representation of history?
2. Does Hollywood ever teach history well?
3. Does Hollywood ever invent a “past that never was?”
4. Does Hollywood shape or reflect current historiography?
5. Why are films designed and created in various genres?
6. Are Hollywood films about a historical topic meant to educate more than entertain?

**Required Unit Objectives:**
Using an analysis worksheet, students will be able to examine the dominant themes of the historical era in which a movie appeared. RH.11-12.2

Using selected film clips, students will examine how Hollywood has distorted the historical record. RH.11-12.7

Using selected film clips, students will examine ways in which Hollywood has accurately depicted a historical event / era / person. RH.11-12.7

Using selected secondary source readings, students will analyze why Hollywood misrepresents the historical truth. RH.11-12.1; RH.11-12.4; RH.11-12.2

**Required Resources:**
National Archives/Document Analysis worksheet for Motion Pictures: http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/worksheets/
primary document ‘Motion Picture Production Code
Hollywood’s America

**Suggested Resources:**
Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies
Website: Filmsite.org - http://www.filmsite.org/
Website: Teach with Movies.com - http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html

Unit 2: Race Relations

Analyze the rationale provided for the justification of slavery and make a comparison as to why and where slavery still exists today.

**Essential Questions:**
1. What was life like for slaves in the American South? 6.1 U.S. History: America in the World
2. Why is it important to understand a slave narrative?? 6.1 U.S. History: America in the World
3. How did slavery change after emancipation?? 6.1 U.S. History: America in the World
4. Why and where is the institution of slavery still prevalent today?? 6.1 U.S. History: America in the World

Required Unit Objectives:
Using primary and secondary sources, students will explain the lasting effects of the Amistad incident. RH.11-12.1; RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.9; 6.1.12.A.3.i

Using the film Amistad, students will assess the role of the abolitionists during this time period. RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.A.3.i

Using the film Amistad, students will analyze why the Supreme Court decided to free the Amistad Africans RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.A.3.i

Using excerpts from the film Birth of a Nation students will analyze how the movie inflamed racial tensions and reflected the prevailing racial attitudes in America circa 1915. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; RH.11-12.9

Using a primary source, students will understand the role of the NAACP with regard to films .RH.11-12.1; RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.4

Using the film Blood Diamonds, students will examine the institution of slavery in contemporary times. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; RH.11-12.9

Required Resources:
Excerpts from Birth of a Nation
The film Amistad
Blood Diamonds or Taken (Slavery today)

Suggested Resources:
Screening America: US History through Film
Movie Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies
Memorandum to ‘Moving Pictures Firms’ from the NAACP/Primary document
Website: Teach with Movies.com - http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html

Unit 3: The West

Essential Questions:
1. Why are Western films a major defining genre of the American film industry?
2. Why are Western films referred to as ‘Horse Opera’?
3. Why are most Western plots based on maintaining law and order?
4. Why were relations so tense between the Native Americans and the White Americans?
5. What are the different ways in which Hollywood has depicted the American Indian and

Required Unit Objectives:
Using excerpts from the film Fort Apache, students will opine on whether it is a courageous act to underestimate your enemy and to put your men at needless risk. RH.11-12.7; WHST.11-12.4; WHST.11-12.6
Using excerpts from the film *Fort Apache*, explain how the movie created a romantic West in the minds of Americans. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Using the film *Dances with Wolves*, students will assess the general attitude of white settlers towards Indians on the frontier. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Using the film *Dances with Wolves*, students will evaluate whether John Dunbar was a traitor to the US Army. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

**Required Resources:**
- Excerpts from *Fort Apache*
- *Dances with Wolves*
- *American History on the Screen: A Teacher’s Resource Book on Film and Video*

**Suggested Resources:**
- Website: Filmsite.org - [http://www.filmsite.org/](http://www.filmsite.org/)
- *Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*
- Digital History: [http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/](http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/)
- Website: Teach with Movies.com - [http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html](http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html)

**Unit 4: Organized Crime**

**Core Standards:** 6.1.12.C.9.a  6.1.12.D.9.b
Analyze the impact that crime had on society as a result of the influence of the gangster, and how their corruption led to internal downfalls within society.

**Essential Questions:**
1. What is meant by the ‘Gangster Cycle’
2. How did Gangsterism, a social problem, emerge as an important genre?
3. What is meant by character prototypes?
4. Why is the gangster made out to be a ‘hero’?
5. Why were / are gangster movies so popular?

**Required Unit Objectives:**
Using film excerpts, students will explain how gangster films were filmed as modern versions of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, an “honorable crime family” RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Using the film *The Godfather*, students will explain why the film is considered to be an insightful study of violence, power, honor and obligation. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

**Required Resources:**
- Excerpts from *Public Enemy*
- Excerpts from *The Untouchables*
- *The Godfather*
- *Hollywood’s America*
Filmsite.org: http://www.filmsite.org/
Teaching with Movies.org: http://www.teachwithmovies.org/

**Suggested Resources:**
Spartacus Educational website: http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/

**Unit 5: The Great Depression / Economics**

Analyze the impact the Great Depression had on the economy and the emotional impact it had on Americans.

**Essential Questions:**
1. Why did the Great Depression produce far reaching transformations in gender roles and within the family unit? 6.1.12.D.9.b
2. Why were feelings of inadequacy so prevalent amongst men at the time? 6.1.12.D.9.b

**Required Unit Objectives:**
Using *The Grapes of Wrath*, students will explain why it is considered a magnificent film in the eyes of film historians. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Students will view other films and make a comparison of right vs. wrong in a situation of when one feels an injustice or complete despair as a result of the Great Depression RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Examine why certain films during the Great Depression (recreated in the 60’s) came to represent Bonnie and Clyde as such a controversy and why the movie became such a rage. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

**Required Resources:**
Excerpts from *The Grapes of Wrath*
Film *Cinderella Man*
Film *Bonnie and Clyde*
*Hollywood’s America*

**Suggested Resources:**
*Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*
*Screening America*
Digital History: http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/
Filmsite.org: http://www.filmsite.org/
Website: Teach with Movies.com - http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html

**Essential Questions:**
1. What is the nature of war?
2. Is war inevitable?
3. What are the differences between wars, ancient battles vs. present?
4. What did / do soldiers feel when facing war in general?
Required Unit Objectives:

Using the film *Platoon*, students will author a written piece discussing how the story told in the movie addressed the concerns of a young enlistee who arrived in Vietnam and what he expected. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; WHST.11-12.2

Using the film *Platoon*, students will evaluate how director Oliver Stone depicts the Vietnam War and will compare and contrast real vs. “reel” history. WHST.11-12.4; WHST.11-12.6

Required Resources:
Excerpts from *Flags of Our Fathers*
*Platoon*
*Screening America*

Suggested Resources:
The Price of Freedom: Americans at War/Smithsonian - [http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/](http://americanhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/)
Website: Teach with Movies.com - [http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html](http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html)

Unit 7: The Cold War

Analyze the ideological differences between the Soviet Union and the United States in understanding the tensions that developed in the Cold War.

Essential Questions:
1. Why is the Cold War era referred to as the Age of Conspiracy and Conformity?
2. How do films relate to ideological positions by reflecting the myths of a historical time period?
3. How do film producers develop their own ideology with their unique expression and interpretation within the films they create?

Required Unit Objectives:
Using Hollywood films, students will explain how art represented the collective paranoia during this time period. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.D.12.b

Using a Hollywood film, students will analyze how movies confronted the issue of the ‘Red Menace’.n RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.D.12.b

Using a Hollywood film, students will explain how the movie industry dealt metaphorically with the era’s preoccupation with foreign ideologies. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.D.12.b

Using *Dr. Strangelove* and primary source films, students will assess how film incorporated the fear of annihilation by the A-bomb and the increasing fear that something was wrong RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.D.12.c

Required Resources:
*Dr. Strangelove*
*Invasion of the Body Snatchers*
*Screening America/Textbook*
Unit 8: Civil Rights Movement


Analyze how the Civil Rights movement marked a period of social and political turmoil that still exist within the Country today within certain ethnicities.

Essential Questions:
1. Why did the events during the Civil Rights movement become so significant in American History?
2. How did the events of the 1960's finally try to implement the promises made after the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th amendments?

Required Unit Objectives:
Using the film *Mississippi Burning*, students will examine why the struggle in the state of Mississippi became a focal point for efforts to improve the conditions of African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; 6.1.12.D.13.a

Using visual images and *Mississippi Burning*, students will appreciate how black citizens endured systematic terror and yet they continued to demand their rights. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; RH.11-12.9; 6.1.12.D.13.a

Using primary and secondary documents, students will explain what Freedom Summer was, why it was significant and how it resulted in the murder of three civil rights activists in 1964. RH.11-12.1; RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; RH.11-12.9; 6.1.12.D.13.a

Required Resources:
*Mississippi Burning*
*American History X*
*Past Imperfect: History According to the Movies*
Guided questions for movie *Mississippi Burning*

Suggested Resources:
*Hollywood’s America*
Website: Teach with Movies.com - [http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html](http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html)

Unit Nine: Legal Concerns


Analyze how the legal system applies and interprets the Constitution according to an individual’s needs while examining the effectiveness and fairness of legislation.
**Essential Questions:**
1. What is the importance of moral and ethical concerns with regard to legal issues?
2. How is the government responsible for fairness and citizenship for all?
3. Why do some legal movies involve disrespect towards the establishment while others want to fight for freedom and make right a wrong?

**Required Unit Objectives:**
Using film, students will consider the idea that legal issues must be resolved by democracies while maintaining the balance between rights of the majority and the minority. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

Using the film *Inherit the Wind*, students will opine on whether creationism / intelligent design may be included in public schools’ curricula. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7; WHST.11-12.4; WHST.11-12.1

Using *Philadelphia* or *Milk*, students will understand that many legal issues involve sensitive topics and will develop an understanding that not all movies have an ending one may anticipate. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7

**Required Resources:**
*Philadelphia*
*Milk*
*A League of their Own*
*Inherit the Wind*

**Suggested Resources:**
Filmsite.org/Best speeches and monologues: [http://www.filmsite.org/](http://www.filmsite.org/)
The History News Network: [http://hnn.us/](http://hnn.us/)
Website: Teach with Movies.com - [http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html](http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html)

**Unit 10: Contemporary America**

Analyze the impact of American policies in foreign affairs and why we are involved in the Mid-East and our fight against terrorism

**Essential Questions:**
1. How should students set about analyzing contemporary American films?
2. How has Hollywood dealt with 9/11 and the ‘War on Terror’?
3. How do films reflect contemporary social, political, economic and military issues?

**Required Unit Objectives:**
Using film and readings, students will craft a working definition of terrorism and opine on whether several historic and current events qualify as terrorism. RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.4; RH.11-12.9; 6.1.12.D.15.d

Using readings and film footage, students will assess how the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 have impacted U.S. foreign and domestic policy. RH.11-12.1; RH.11-12.2; RH.11-12.7 ; 6.1.12.D.14.a
**Required Resources:**
Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11*
*The Hurt Locker*

**Suggested Resources:**
CNN archives discussion on Terrorism: [http://topics.cnn.com/topics/terrorism](http://topics.cnn.com/topics/terrorism)
*United 93*
Website: Teach with Movies.com - [http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html](http://www.teachwithmovies.org/index.html)