

American History through Film Course Syllabus (Fall Semester)

Since Thomas A. 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.

1. **The first area:**
 - a. Introduction to the time period.
 - b. What the film is about.
 - c. Where does the film fit-in?
2. **The second area:**
 - a. Watching of the movie.
 - b. Classroom discussion.

3. The third and final area:

- a. Post work (discussion questions).
- b. Work sheets.
- c. Film reviews.
- d. Bringing it altogether essays.

This class will be a writing and research intensive class. Being gone for the actual watching of the film will cause problems. There is no make-up for missed portions of the film. 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 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 twelve 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?

FALL SEMESTER:

1—English Colonies to American Republic:

***The New World* (NR: 172 min) (2008).**

An epic dramatization of Pocahontas' relationships with John Smith and John Rolfe.

***John Adams* (PG-TV: 501 min) (2008).**

Chronicles the life of Founding Father John Adams.

2—Manifest Destiny:

***The Alamo* (PG-13: 137 min) (2004).**

Tale of 200 men and the fight for Texas independence.

***Gettysburg* (PG, 271 min) (1993).**

Story of the 1863 Civil War Battle of Gettysburg.

***Lincoln* (PG-13: 150 min) (2013).**

This drama focuses on the final four months in office as this visionary leader pursues a course of action to end the Civil War.

***Dances with Wolves* (PG-13: 185 min) (1990).**

Story of a white soldier who posts in the 1870 Dakotas and becomes friends with the Lakota Sioux.

***Fort Apache* (NR: 128 min) (BW) (1940).**

The soldiers at Fort Apache may disagree with the tactics of their glory-seeking commander. But to a man they're duty bound to obey.

Supplemental Texts:

- Benton, William. Selected Readings on Great Issues in American History (1620-1968).
- Gillon, Steven. 10 Days that Unexpectedly Changed America, New York: MJF Books, 2006.
- Howe, Daniel W. What Hath God Wrought: the Transformation of America, 1815-1848, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Marcus, Robert and Burner, David. America Firsthand: Readings from Settlement to Reconstruction, Volume 1, 5th Edition, Boston: St. Martin's Press, 2001.
- Millett, Allan and Maslowski, Peter. For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States, New York: Free Press, 1994.
- The Annals of America: Great Issues in American Life, Volume I, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1968.
- United States Supreme Court Decisions: A Case Study Review for US History and Government, Albany, New York: New York State Bar Association, 1999.
- Paine, Thomas. Common Sense, Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1997.

- Potter, David M. *The Impending Crisis: America before the Civil War 1848-1861*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2011.
- Wood, Gordon, S. *The Radicalism of the American Revolution*, New York: Vintage Books, 1991.

Nine Historical Thinking Skills:

Students will be continuously reintroduced to the Nine Historical Thinking Skill throughout the academic year.

- Historical Causation.
- Patterns of Continuity and Change over Time.
- Periodization.
- Comparison.
- Contextualization.
- Historical Argument.
- Appropriate Use of Historical Evidence.
- Interpretation.
- Synthesis.

Grading:

Participation and Attendance:	(30%).
Research, Writing and Journaling:	(25%).
Analysis of Historical Content:	(25%).
Analysis of Hollywood’s Historical Content:	(20%).

Participation and Attendance:

This is the most important part of the course. If you miss a class, you must make arrangements to view the missed movie part (s) and notes and discussion points. If you are absent please make arrangements to have a fellow student turn it in for you. If you have a legal absence on the day you have 3 class days to make up the work. Make ups can only be accomplished after school, by appointment.

Student Supplies:

- Five (5) Subject notebook per academic quarter.
- One (1) pack of 3x5 cards per academic quarter.
- Enough pens to get you through.