

Film Analysis

Mr. David Sudak

University High School, Classroom T10 Email: David.Sudak@tusd1.org (Please communicate via email.) Course Website: www.davidsudak.weebly.com

Movies are important and they're dangerous... You go into a little dark room and become incredibly vulnerable. On the one hand all your perspectives can be challenged, or you feel something maybe you can't feel normally. Movies can encourage you to be the protagonist in your own life.

-actress Susan Sarandon

[In film] there are certain tools that you use and those tools become part of a vocabulary that is just as valid as the vocabulary used in literature... It still has the same grammar...panning left and right, tracking in and out, booming up and down, intercutting a certain way, the use of a close-up as opposed to a medium shot...the different kinds of lighting...you use all of these elements to make an emotional and psychological point to an audience.

-director Martin Scorsese

Essential Questions

- How do the many different languages of film – visual, aural, and textual - work together holistically to express a desired outcome, effect, and/or message?
- In what respects can visual literacy improve our individual lives and society?
- Would there be movies without novels?
- How can we continue to evolve as reflective and academic thinkers, writers, and discussants?

Overview

Film Analysis is a yearlong English elective offered to juniors and seniors. Our focus is on the medium of film across genres, geographical borders, and time periods. Ultimately we will “read” film in the manner that we read texts in a Language Arts class – with a focus on style, structure, imagery, tone, mood, viewpoint, plot, character, setting, symbol, and, in all cases, meaning. In tandem with AP Literature and Language courses, our analysis of dramatic and documentary films will align these technical considerations (and more filmic ones, of course) to a director’s purpose or rhetorical message. Accordingly, this course presents an additional platform for critical thinking, academic writing, and discussion for the college-bound student.

Based on its ever-burgeoning quality, the temptation to include television is enormous. Be that as it may, this course will center on cinema.

Modes of Discourse and Assignments

In addition to carefully viewing them – a process that will demand your intellect, emotions, memories, and senses - plan on researching, discussing, and writing about films. Discussions will range from informal to scored. You’ll keep a “Film Journal” to record notes, observations, and responses during viewings or prior to discussions. There will be a range of assignments, requiring you to write in expository, argumentative, and reflective modes (for example, short analysis essays, reviews, and routine journaling). In general, we’ll embrace best practices as writers, and align the kind of writing we do in this class with your other classes.

Genres and Corresponding Films

For the most part the full-length movies on our menu are based on genre and time of production (though a few exceptions focus on specified directors as opposed to genre).

Ultimately, **we will only have time for a selection of titles from the list below**, based on both our pacing and the instructor's appreciation for organic development in the classroom. Accordingly, we may break our chronology at any time if the circumstances inspire us to do so. **Note to parent/guardian:** Film subjects are based on the careful selection of vetted films, with appropriateness and subject matter rigorously considered. Any R rated films are indicated with an asterisk. If you have concerns about individual titles, please let me know.

Silent – *The Kid* (Charlie Chaplin, 1921); *The Lodger* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1927)
Monster Movie – *King Kong* (Cooper & Shoedsack, 1933)
Propaganda Film/Documentary (1) – *Triumph of the Will* (Leni Riefenstahl, 1934)
Screwball Comedy – *It Happened One Night* (Frank Capra, 1934)
Classic Hollywood – *Citizen Kane* (Orson Welles, 1941)
Italian Neorealism – *Bicycle Thieves* (Vittorio de Sica, 1948)
Western – *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956)
Bergman – *The Seventh Seal* (Ingmar Bergman, 1957)
Hitchcock – *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958)
French New Wave – *Breathless* (Jean-Luc Goddard, 1960)
Musical – *West Side Story* (Wise & Robbins, 1961)
Satire 1 – *Doctor Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964)
Holocaust – *The Pawnbroker* (Sydney Lumet, 1964)*
Horror – *Rosemary's Baby* (Roman Polanski, 1968)*
Road Movie – *Easy Rider* (Dennis Hopper, 1969)*
Gangster – *The Godfather* (Francis Ford Coppola, 1972)*
Children's – *Charlotte's Web* (Hanna-Barbera, 1973)
Political Thriller/Newspaper– *All the Presidents Men* (Alan Pakula, 1974)
Cassavetes – *A Woman Under the Influence* (John Cassavetes, 1974)*
Heist Movie – *Dog Day Afternoon* (Sydney Lumet, 1975)*
The Blockbuster – *Jaws* (Steven Spielberg, 1975)
Documentary (2) – *Grey Gardens* (Maysles brothers, 1976)
Romantic Comedy – *Annie Hall* (Woody Allen, 1977)
Period Piece – *Days of Heaven* (Terrence Malick, 1978)
Martial Arts – *Five Deadly Venoms* (Chang Cheh, 1978)
Science Fiction – *Alien* (Ridley Scott, 1979)
Family Drama – *Ordinary People* (Robert Redford, 1980)*
Courtroom/Legal Drama – *The Verdict* (Sydney Lumet, 1982)*
Dystopia – *Blade Runner* (Ridley Scott, 1982)
Thriller – *Blood Simple* (Coen bros, 1984)
Music Biopic – *Sid & Nancy* (Alex Cox, 1986)*
Religion – *The Mission* (Roland Joffe, 1986)
Documentary (3) – *The Thin Blue Line* (Errol Morris, 1988)
Social Problem Film – *Do the Right Thing* (Spike Lee, 1989)
Medicine – *Awakenings* (Penny Marshall, 1990)
Gender – *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)*; *The Piano* (Jane Campion, 1993)*
Black Comedy – *Pulp Fiction* (Quentin Tarantino, 1994)*
Sports Movie/Documentary (4) – *Hoop Dreams* (Steve James, 1994)

Japanese Animation – *Princess Mononoke* (Hayao Miyazaki, 1997)
Metafiction – *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999)*
Love/Seduction – *In the Mood for Love* (Wong Kar-Wai, 2000)
Cult – *Donnie Darko* (Richard Kelly, 2001)*
Comic Strip – *Ghost World* (Terry Zwigoff, 2001)*
Wes Anderson – *The Royal Tenenbaums*, 2001)*
Fantasy – *Pan's Labrynth* (Guillermo del Toro, 2006)*
Film Noir – *Michael Clayton* (Tony Gilroy, 2007)*
War - *The Hurt Locker* (Kathryn Bigelow, 2008)*
Education – *The Class* (Laurent Cantet, 2008)
Dance/Documentary (5) – *Pina* (Wim Wenders, 2011)
Philosophical – *Tree of Life* (Terrence Malick, 2011)
Documentary (6) *Stories We Tell* (Sarah Polley, 2012)
American New Wave – *Frances Ha* (Noah Baumbach, 2013)*
Existentialism - *The Great Beauty* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2013)*
Just Because – *Lemonade* (Beyonce Knowles, 2016)
Satire 2 – *Get Out* (Jordan Peele, 2017*)
Superhero – *Logan* (James Mangold, 2017)*

During the first semester, we will generally dedicate a day each week to discuss, model, and analyze film vocabulary/techniques (for example, mise-en-scene and all the visually expressive elements it encompasses, directing, editing, casting, scripting, scoring, and sound). These lessons will usually include short (5-20 minute) modeling sequences from titles not listed above, and most often limited to opening credits.

Film Texts and Sources

Writing About Movies – Karen Gocsik et al, WW Norton
Film Genres – Lester Freidman et al, WW Norton
Looking at Movies – Richard Barsam, WW Norton
Birth of a Nation (DW Griffith, 1915)
Hitchcock/Truffaut, - (F. Truffaut, Simon & Shuster)
The Story of Film: An Odyssey – Mark Cousins, Music Box Films (15 part DVD series)
The Kid Stays in the Picture (documentary, 2002)
The Cutting Edge: The Magic of Movie Editing (documentary, 2004)
 Professor David Thorburn's MIT lectures
Score (documentary, 2016)
 "The Thief" (Master of None, S2, Ep. 1)

Course Assessment

We'll use a points grading system categorized as follows:

- Discussions (multi-format)
- Written Work
- Production projects (Frame-a-Scene, Shoot-a-Sequence)
- Film Journal
- Presentations

- Tests & Quizzes

Student Led Discussions

Students who demonstrate leadership and commitment during semester one will be eligible to present films from our list, including leading discussions, during semester 2, for extra credit.

Policies & Expectations

Deadlines: In general, late homework is docked ½ a letter grade per each school day late. Extensions may be granted, dependent on the circumstances (and in most cases these should be requested in advance of the due date with a valid reason).

Absences: If you are unexpectedly absent on a day that something previously assigned is due, plan on turning the work in on the first day back in class. Similarly, if you miss an assessment due to an unexpected excused absence, make arrangements for a make up on the day you return (this doesn't mean you need to make it up that day). Make ups will not be allowed if the absence is unexcused, and late homework will be penalized accordingly. **PLEASE NOTE:** should you miss class - and subsequently film viewings/discussions - due to a sports/activity/expected absence, consult with the instructor prior to the actual absence.

Participation/Conduct: Because of the interactive and collaborative nature of many of this course's learning activities, your participation is required (and not just during weekly scored discussions). Additionally, the manner in which you engage will figure into your final grade. Were you a respectful discussant? Were you generally on time to class? Were you proactive and timely about absences and making up missed work? Each semester will include a significant culminating score reflecting these issues.

Presentation of Written Work: With the exception of writing completed during class (bell-work, prep for discussion, journaling), written assignments, including drafts, must be typed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, MLA format). Be advised that handwritten papers will never be accepted. Please do not ask me to print essays for you, or email assignments in lieu of turning in hard copy; my expectation is that you'll have essays printed and ready to turn in by the beginning of class on the due date. Make provisions for printing ahead of time (and be aware of library closures if that is your only mode of printing).

FIRST HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT: After both you and a parent/guardian have read the above course syllabus, **detach the last page**, read the course contracts, sign as indicated, and return to Mr. Sudak on Friday, August 4th.

Plagiarism Contract

Plagiarism can be defined as submitting another person's ideas, words, images or data without giving that person credit or proper acknowledgement. Plagiarism, a form of academic dishonesty, is tantamount to stealing and will not be tolerated. You should be aware that you need to acknowledge sources when you:

- use phrases, quotes, or ideas not your own.
- paraphrase the work of another *even though you may have changed the wording or syntax*.
- use facts or data not considered common knowledge.
- submit a paper from an essay service or agency even though you may have paid for it.
- submit a paper by another person even though he or she may have given you permission to use it.
- work on assignments with another student if partner/group work has not been assigned.

You should also note that plagiarism not only encompasses written work, but also computer data, research, musical scores, video programs, and visual arts.

Plagiarism reflects on character; therefore, you should avoid inadvertent plagiarism. **You will also be held responsible for unintentional plagiarism.** Plagiarism is a serious issue, especially in an academic environment. Teachers must be able to rely on the integrity of a student's work in order to maintain a climate for successful learning. We will discuss methods for avoiding plagiarism as the school year progresses. When you are unsure if acknowledgement is needed, ask your teacher.

The penalties for plagiarism begin with an automatic failing grade for the assignment. This may significantly lower your final grade. Furthermore, plagiarism, a form of cheating, will automatically result in a referral to administration. Repeated plagiarism will result in more serious consequences, according to the University High School conduct code.

I, _____, am aware of the serious nature of plagiarism and will not use or submit someone else's work without acknowledgement. Furthermore, I will not misrepresent someone else's work as my own, or help anyone else to plagiarize my work or another's.

Student signature _____

Date _____

Course Outline & Policies Contract

Students & parents/guardians: please sign below and return this document to class to let me know that you have read and understand the course outline and policies.

Student (PRINT NAME)

Student (SIGNATURE)

Date

Parent/guardian (PRINT NAME)

Parent/guardian (SIGNATURE)

Date

Parent/guardian E-Mail Address (legible, please!)

Parent/guardian daytime phone