

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?
- How can we continue to evolve as reflective and academic thinkers, writers, and discussants via the medium of film?
- How can we differentiate a film's aesthetic and anthropological qualities?

Overview

Film Analysis is a yearlong, upper-class English elective. 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 do texts in a Language Arts class – with a focus on style, structure, imagery, tone, mood, viewpoint, plot, character, setting, and symbol, and how these contribute to 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 and, when applicable, rhetoric. Accordingly, this course presents an additional platform for critical thinking, academic writing, and discussion for the college-bound student. While there are a couple light production assignments, we will spend the majority of our time centering on film history, technique, and analysis.

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 and following lectures and film viewings, and sometimes 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 presented according to genre and time of production (though a few exceptions focus on specified directors as opposed to genre). **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'll break from our chronology when 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); *Nosferatu* (Friedrich Murnau, 1922)
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)
Monster Movie – *Godzilla*, 1954 (Ishiro Honda)
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 – *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 – *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (Steven Spielberg, 1977)
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)
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*
Nature/Documentary (5) – *Grizzly Man* (Werner Herzog, 2005)*
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 (6) – *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, 2012)*
Existentialism - *The Great Beauty* (Paolo Sorrentino, 2013)*
Just Because – *Lemonade* (Beyonce Knowles, 2016)
Superhero – *Logan* (James Mangold, 2017)*
Spike Lee Joint – *BlackKkKlansman* (2018)*

During the first semester, we will generally dedicate a day each week to discuss, model, and analyze film vocabulary & technique (for example, mise-en-scene and all the visually expressive elements it encompasses, in addition to directing, editing, casting, scripting, scoring, and sound). These lessons will usually include short, five to twenty-minute, modeling sequences from titles not listed above, often limited to opening credits (like the very opening of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, which set a high bar for both visual and sound design).

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
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)
In the Blink of an Eye, a Perspective on Film Editing, William Murch, Silman-James
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 (analysis essays, review)

- Production projects (Frame-a-Scene, Shoot-a-Sequence)
- Film Journal
- Presentations
- Final exams (test on film techniques S1, scored seminar S2)

Student Led Films

Students who demonstrate leadership and commitment during semester one will be eligible to present films from our list, including lecturing, and designing/facilitating discussions, during semester two, 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 at school (note—even if class doesn't convene on that day). Similarly, if you miss an assessment (quiz, scored discussion, presentation) due to an unexpected excused absence, *make arrangements* IN PERSON for a make up on the day you return (again, even if class doesn't meet that day), else I will limit the amount of time you have for make ups. Make ups will not be permitted if the absence is unexcused, and late homework will be penalized accordingly. PLEASE NOTE: Should you miss class (and subsequently film viewings) due to a sports/school activity absence, you must consult with the instructor IN PERSON prior to the actual absence.

Be advised that your teacher has a problem with routinely absent students in general, and even more so in the cases when students regularly miss film viewings (and subsequently can't contribute to discussions). Rule of thumb: the more proactive you are about absences the more flexible I will be with respect to scheduling make ups.

Weekly scored discussions function as assessments, as you are required to respond to complex prompts without the aid of the internet or supplemental sources and scored based on the efficacy of your responses. Accordingly, if you miss a scored discussion you will be required to respond in writing to specified prompts in order to be excused from the discussion, so long as your work is thorough and turned in via hard copy within 48 hours.

A note on scheduling meetings with a counselor during class: any meetings of the kind need to be approved **in advance** by me. In no case can you miss a class to visit a counselor if we are viewing a film.

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, notes, journaling), written assignments, including drafts, must be typed (double-spaced, 12 pt. font, MLA format). In most cases you will submit essays electronically via Turnitin.

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 ^{3rd}.

(Please detach, read, and accordingly sign contracts on pages 7 & 8.)

(Please detach, read, and accordingly sign contracts on pages 7 & 8.)

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