

GRADE 12 CINEMA AS A WITNESS TO MODERN HISTORY

Course Overview

Media literacy

“Media literacy is an informed, critical understanding of the mass media. It involves examining the techniques, technologies and institutions involved in media production; being able to critically analyze media messages; and recognizing the role audiences play in making meaning from those messages.”

– Rick Shepherd

Historical consciousness

“Historical consciousness can thus be defined as individual and collective understandings of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors which shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and the future.”

– Peter Seixas

Course Goals

- to develop critical media literacy through an exploration of cinema
- to enrich students’ knowledge and understanding of world history since the beginning of the 20th century
- to apply the concepts of historical thinking to the analysis of a variety of film genres in documentary and dramatic cinema

Course Description

This course will engage students in an exploration of the connections among cinema as an *art form*, cinema as a *product of history*, and cinema as an *interpreter of history*. Students will respond to and discuss the aesthetic and emotional elements of cinema and will apply historical thinking concepts to the analysis of historical themes as represented in various films and other sources.

Throughout the course, students will apply critical media literacy skills in order to understand that film does not simply reflect the past, but interprets and retells the past and, at times, reconstructs it.

Students will view and respond to a limited number of carefully selected films that deal with key events, ideas, people, and developments that have shaped world history since the beginning of the 20th century (e.g., wars, revolutions, genocides, economic change, the legacy of colonialism and decolonization, gender roles and stereotypes, social values, and scientific and technological

advances, etc.). Students will learn to critically analyze the role of film in interpreting selected historical topics and will be guided to reflect on the role of cinema in shaping their own historical consciousness.

With a suggested study of eight to ten films, the course emphasis will be on quality rather than quantity. The proposed film selection includes representative examples of feature-length fictional films, documentaries, animation, black-and-white films, and independent films, and draws from various defining periods in the history of cinema, as well as from Canadian, international, and Hollywood mass media productions.

This course is based on a pedagogical approach that uses film as an instructional tool for both media literacy and the study of history. It includes model learning experiences based on suggested study films, guiding questions for critical film viewing, guidelines for further film selection, and background information on film history and the techniques of cinema.

Throughout the course, students will engage in guided viewing, write film critiques that show evidence of historical thinking and critical media literacy, and conduct historical research to evaluate and reflect on representations of history in film.

What will students learn to do, to understand, and to apply in this course?

Students will

- view films of various genres and reflect critically on cinematic representations of historical events, figures, ideas, and developments of the 20th century
- analyze and evaluate the techniques of cinema as an art form
- consider how documentary and fictional films reflect the values and perspectives of the society in which they originated
- conduct research into historical sources in order to analyze interpretation, error, bias, or anachronism in the representation of historical subjects in cinema
- apply the following six historical thinking concepts to analyze representations of history in film:
 - establish historical significance
 - use historical evidence
 - identify continuity and change
 - analyze cause and consequence
 - take historical perspectives
 - understand the ethical dimensions of history
- deconstruct and respond to selected films, including examples from local and Canadian cinema, international cinema, and American mass media productions

- study the evolution of film techniques and technologies
- write film critiques that apply principles of critical media literacy and historical thinking
- compare and evaluate the aesthetic and evocative qualities of various film genres
- assess the historical context of film production and the emergence of cinema as a business and a force in popular culture
- enrich their knowledge of significant developments in modern world history
- reflect critically on the role of cinema as a purveyor of persuasive social messages that deal with a range of controversial or sensitive subjects
- examine and assess the social role of cinema, the cinematic portrayal of violence, and the adequacy of film in interpreting history