

# TEACHING GUIDE: HOW TO USE MOVIES IN THE CLASSROOM





## ▶ JOSEPH GOLDBERG TEACHING WITH FILM, LLC

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# TEACHING GUIDE: HOW TO USE MOVIES IN THE CLASSROOM

## PRE-SCREENING

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### USE FILM PURPOSEFULLY.

Always choose and use film purposefully to achieve specific learning outcomes. Using film when there is no clear learning goal in mind devalues and stigmatizes film and squanders precious class time.

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### ALIGN FILM WITH THE ELA STANDARDS.

Students should listen to, read, speak and write about film, and they should produce deliverable work relating to it. Let the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts (ELA) guide much of your planning. Have students, for example, initiate and participate in collaborative discussions that build on others' ideas and express their own clearly and persuasively; analyze how complex characters develop and contribute to the film's theme; analyze how the composer's choices concerning structure, order of events, or manipulation of time create mystery, tension, or surprise to reference just a few of the dozens of ELA standards that explicitly or implicitly connect to film.

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## PREVIEW THE FILM FIRST.

Always preview any film you show in the classroom in advance, and ensure it fits within your school's standards and guidelines of classroom appropriateness. Be transparent, and use parental consent forms as appropriate. It's also better to forewarn students about content that might be difficult, and offer an alternative film if needed. Commonsensemedia.org is a helpful resource that catalogs the content and age-appropriateness of many films.

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## SET EXPECTATIONS.

Explain to your students why and how you are using film, what deliverable work they will produce related to the film, and clarify your viewing expectations of them upfront. Unfortunately, many students are accustomed to film in the classroom being tantamount to throwaway time. Though the classroom lights are off, let them know it is not time to sleep, use devices, socialize, or do other work. Teachers should model behavioral expectations. Movies in the classroom should be enjoyable, but they should also be educational – the two are not mutually exclusive. In fact, deeper understanding inevitably leads to deeper enjoyment.

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## FRAME THE FILM.

Frame the way your students experience the film and prime their thinking with pre-screening learning opportunities. Draw on students' prior knowledge by posing discussion or short written response questions relating to the film's topics and themes. For example, consider having students read and respond to a nonfiction article that anticipates the film's topics and themes. Create a foundation for students to increase conceptual connections as they watch the film, which deepens their thinking and learning.



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## DURING AND POST-SCREENING

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### TURN ON CAPTIONS.

Captions make films more inclusive and accessible for students with hearing impairments, for students whose first language is not English, and for all students to better follow what the characters say. A few might complain, but they will quickly adapt. Captions also highlight the screenplay's dialogue and diction. They are particularly beneficial for overcoming the rich language in Shakespearean texts by allowing students to both see and hear the language and match it with the performances of the actors.

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### DISRUPT FILM, CAREFULLY.

Pausing film is critical for learning. However, movies are meant to be consumed from start to finish in one sitting, and disrupting that can fundamentally alter how we make sense of a movie. Limits to class time make disruption inevitable, so best to use carefully considered, natural scene breaks as pausing points to maintain the integrity of the film's narrative and pacing, and to preserve the film's immersive enjoyment. It might be tempting to hit pause for every worthwhile camera shot or snippet of dialogue, but consider first showing uninterrupted segments (possibly 20-40 minutes, depending on the length of class) of the film and then go back and revisit those worthwhile moments afterward.

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## GIVE STUDENTS SPACE TO WATCH THE FILM.

While the instinct to make students take notes or answer questions while they watch film is understandable, that risks students missing what is up on the screen while they are looking down at their paper - spoiling their viewing experience, and thereby replacing their learning motivation with nothing but frustration. Students must absolutely engage in academic work with film. However, that will more effectively occur before, in-between, after viewing, and while viewing segments of the film a second time, rather than while viewing the film the first time.

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## ENGAGE BETWEEN SCREENING SEGMENTS.

After watching segments of a film and pausing at natural scene breaks, leave time at the end of the period for discussion, checks for understanding and accompanying assignments. Reserving time at the beginning of the following class, before screening the next segment, is a great opportunity to cue up a still frame or short sequence from the previous segment for closer inspection and analysis. This deepens understanding, refreshes student memory of the previously viewed segment, and works toward restoring the cohesiveness of the film's structure.



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## SHARE THE FILM WITH STUDENTS.

Provide the movie to your students. Streaming film allows students unique access to their own 'copy' of the film on a device, which mirrors having their own copy of a class book. This gives students an unprecedented opportunity for students to re-'read' and close-'read' any segment of a film, by pausing and scrubbing to any spot, just as they might flip back to any page of a book for closer inspection. This way, students can overcome the non-stopping and overwhelming nature of film to conduct detailed analysis.

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## ANALYZE THE NARRATIVITY AND GRAMMAR OF FILM.

Providing the film to students might sometimes work best after completing viewing, in between viewing the film in segments, or possibly ahead of time in a flipped classroom model. In many ways, film tells stories just like books. However, the literary elements common to both mediums (setting, conflict, characterization, plot structure, etc) are often more visible to students through film. Students may further develop their ELA skills by learning about the cinematic/ linguistic elements that are unique to film (camera angles, shots and movement, framing, etc). Students should identify and analyze the filmmakers' narrative and linguistic choices, and the meanings they create, in a still frame or short sequence of film. They may present their analysis through an oral presentation, by creating a PowerPoint, Google Slides, Prezi presentation or video essay, or by composing a formal analytical essay.

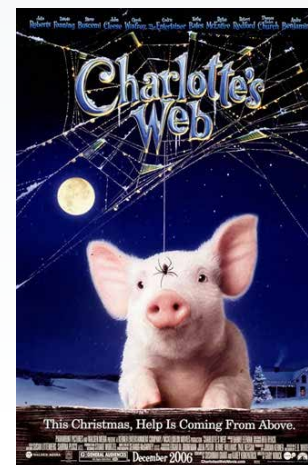
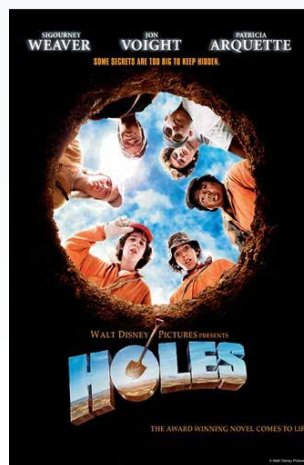
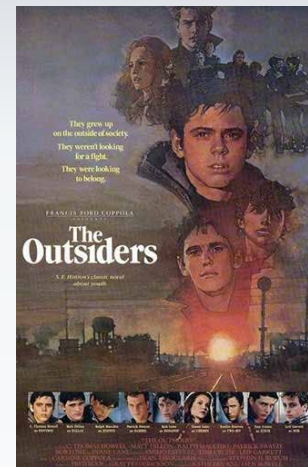
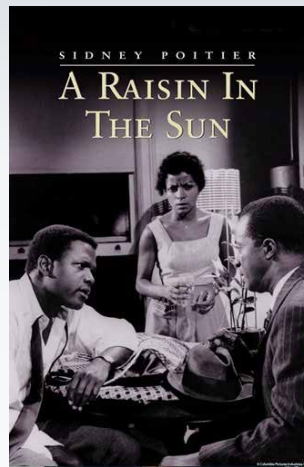
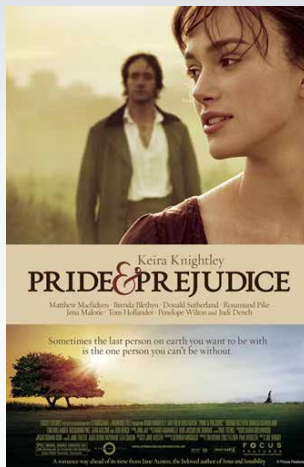
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## ENHANCE FILM ADAPTATIONS.

If using the film adaptation of a book, push beyond the limits of the superficial 'compare and contrast' strategy. Of course a 300-page novel and its two-hour film adaptation have differences. Facilitate student exploration of how those differences impact the development of characters and the theme, and what those

differences reflect about their respective times, places, cultures, composers and mediums. Also consider pairing different print and film titles that align conceptually or thematically, pairing the film and its screenplay, or sometimes using film as the primary text instead.



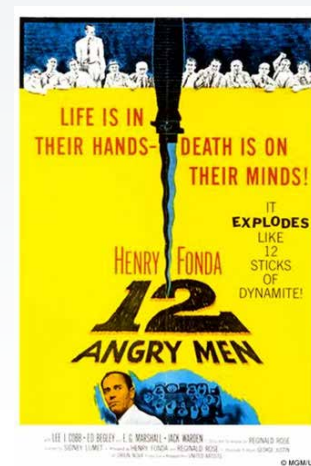
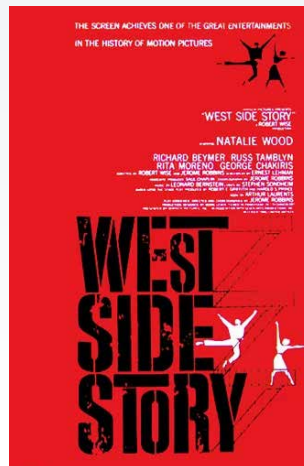
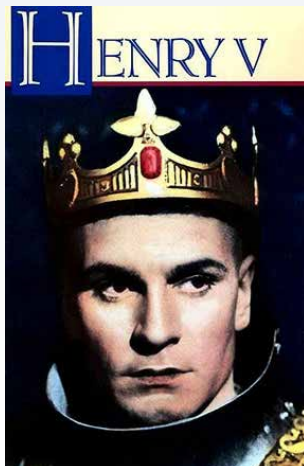
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## USE FILM AS THEATER.

When a trip to the theater is not possible, consider showing the film. Plays are written to be experienced through live performance, and film is often the closest thing in the classroom. Exploring the play on the page is enormously important and productive for learning, but that can often be more effective

after students experience it on the screen. Rather than being a shortcut for students to avoid reading the play, students often have more investment, interest, understanding and confidence to navigate the often unfamiliar and challenging genre of plays after first experiencing it via performance, as the playwright intended.



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## ANALYZE IDEOLOGY.

According to the Alliance for a Media Literate America, media messages are produced for particular purposes and contain embedded values and points of view, which can influence beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process. Thus, in age-appropriate ways, it is essential that teachers facilitate student inquiry and critical thinking regarding how film explicitly and implicitly communicates messages concerning violence, politics, economics, diversity, representation, class, race, gender and sexuality, and what is at stake with that.

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## CREATE WITH FILM.

Students should engage in as many phases of the filmmaking process as possible. They should create short story ideas, scripts and storyboards that visualize them through drawings or digital composition tools, capture their stories through still photos or live video recordings using video cameras or their cellphones, and assemble the footage they capture through the editing process (using educational editing software or apps on their phones). Students should reflect on their myriad choices throughout the process, and how those choices impact the telling of their story through a short presentation, written analysis, or video essay that they create. Students might also storyboard or film a short scene based on a movie's screenplay prior to seeing the movie, create a shot-for-shot remake of a scene they have viewed, reshoot a scene with different cinematic choices, or create and film a trailer for a movie or an alternative ending.

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## TRANSFER THE LEARNING.

While studying and learning about film is extremely valuable in and of itself, the concepts and skills learned with and about film are highly transferable to many other contexts. The symbolism, irony, characterization and other literary elements of film transfer to literature. The linguistic conventions of camera shots, angles and editing that comprise the grammar of film afford an excellent schema for students to understand syntax, diction and editing in print forms. Close-reading a frame's composition is excellent

practice for close-reading poetry or a snippet of a novel, and the process of creating with film is excellent rehearsal for other projects and the writing process. The content, conflicts, ideologies and human experiences embedded in film have great applicability to real situations and experiences in students' lives as well. The more the connections between film and all the above are established for students, the more applicable, versatile and deep their skills and learning become.



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*Teaching With Film, LLC strives to provide English teachers with resources that allow film in the classroom to reach its full instructional potential. This information articulates the educational rationale and value of teaching with film in the ELA classroom. It draws from classroom practice and numerous scholarly fields, including Multiple Literacies Theory (MLC), Universal Design Theory (UDT), critical pedagogy, constructivist learning theory, motivational learning theory, cognitive film theory and beyond. It is intended to assist teachers in their own classroom practice, as well as to assist teachers who find their use of film in the classroom questioned.*

*Teaching With Film, LLC has made good faith efforts to cite each source in this document and intends, with their inclusion, to promote them. Educators are encouraged to learn more about film pedagogy by investigating them. Teaching With Film, LLC claims no responsibility for the content of these sources, especially as they may be updated over time.*



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