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U.S. History and Culture through Feature Films

Американская история и культура на основе художественных фильмов

Учебное пособие

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Учебное пособие знакомит студентов с историей и культурой США посредством кинематографа как средства отражения национальной и мировой культуры. Текстовый материал и система заданий пособия способствуют формированию у студентов представления о кинематографе как виде искусства, готовят их к вдумчивому и критичному восприятию предметного содержания художественных фильмов и использованию их как для совершенствования иноязычной коммуникативной компетенции, так и в качестве источника информации для будущей профессиональной деятельности.

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
1. Cinema as a Part of the US Culture	
1.1. Lead-in.....	6
1.2. The History of Cinema	12
1.3. Film Creation Process	17
1.4. Film Industry	27
1.5. Film Evaluation and Awarding	36
2. Film Discussion and Analysis	
2.1. Background Information	42
2.2. Types of Film	45
2.3. Cinematic Techniques	50
2.4. Literary Devices in Movies	64
2.5. Film Review	72
3. Films for Viewing and Analysis	
3.1. Gone with the Wind	78
3.2. Titanic.....	91
3.3. Argo	104
4. Films Related Texts for Reading and Discussion	
4.1. Slavery: a World-Wide View, Then and Now	112
4.2. Could the <i>Titanic</i> Have Been Saved?.....	120
4.3. How the CIA Used a Fake Sci-Fi Flick to Rescue Americans from Tehran	124
5. Recommendations	
5.1. Other Films to Learn the US History and Culture	134
5.2. Film Study Worksheet for Historical Fiction.....	151
References	
Text Sources	153
Illustrations' Sources	154

Introduction

Most people enjoy watching films. Movies amuse us, give us food for thought, offer us subjects for discussions and even for making small talk. However, entertainment is not the only merit of feature films, they can also inform and educate their audience.

First, watching foreign language films is extremely beneficial to master one's language skills. Movies represent a 'real world,' at least from a linguistic perspective, as we hear contemporary native speakers, with the accent and inflection of modern foreign language. Apart from being an excellent source of linguistic input, foreign language movies introduce audience to the culture and attitudes of foreign countries, that's why original movies in English allow us to get in touch with the culture of English-speaking world.

Second, every film tells us its story. These stories depict some historical period they take place in. For this reason films can be considered as a source of historical information, especially if they tell a story about the past. Watching such a kind of film leaves us with an impression about the featured historical event and time, so we are often exposed to events from the past through film.

A lot of popular feature-length Hollywood films contain reasonably accurate portrayals of events in American history, and watching an appropriate piece of historical fiction adds an element of deeply felt experience of a specific period of the past. However, feature films that deal with historical topics are, in fact, works of fiction, which employ the devices of fiction, and it is essential to recognize historical fiction in film and to analyze them as a work of fiction, to see protagonists, antagonists, conflicts, resolution, characters with various personality traits, and other literary elements and devices.

Besides, filmmakers need to capture the viewer's attention, and sometimes introduce factual errors in the interests of telling a better story, making it more gripping and exciting, or adding the effect of suspense. That is why it is crucial to develop critical thinking while watching historical fiction to be able to create a clear picture in your mind. This book is intended to lead you to reflect on learning about the past from films and to develop skills with which to evaluate a moviemaker's interpretation of history.

The first section is devoted to general information about cinema as a part of culture. You will learn its origin and development, the filmmaking process and secrets, how film industry works, how films are assessed, evaluated and awarded and why Academy Awards are called Oscars.

The second section will enrich your vocabulary with cinema-related terms and some specific lexical items to talk about films, will introduce you to cinematic

techniques and literary devices used in films, will explain how film creators make us sympathize one characters and hate others, and will teach you to write a film review.

The third section contains three specially selected films accompanied with tasks to present an example how films should be viewed to obtain the most possible benefit and develop your skills in analyzing movies. Working with the first film you will learn to look at both sides of a conflict and analyze events from different perspectives, the second one will focus on presenting cultural information in a movie, and the third deals with minor historical distortions, the reasons of their implementation and the means to correct them. You will understand why don't film creators keep to the historical truth and how to make it clear what really happened.

All three films are followed by articles for supplementary reading and discussion, included in the fourth section of the book. They present the other point of view on the events taking place in the films. These articles will help you form a clearer picture of the events portrayed in movies and further develop critical thinking approaches and skills.

The final, fifth section of the book, contains a list of recommended films to learn about the U.S. history and culture and the worksheet task for dealing with any historical feature film. The films are arranged according to the period of the past they portray and are accompanied with short descriptions. This will help you select the movie according to your interests and perform independent project work and practice the skills and analytical tools you've learnt.

Movies of the third section of the book are recommended to be watched in class as far as they present examples of how the work on movies can be organized, and they should serve not only as an entertaining alternative educational experience, but also as the focus for class discussions and assignments. The films of the final section are supposed to be viewed outside of class, either on your own, with your family and friends, or with your groupmates. It is a good idea to keep a journal on the films you have watched, so that you can revisit and re-evaluate your previous experience of viewing and analyzing films, and thus develop your critical viewing skills and abilities of using feature films as a source of historical and cultural information.

1. Cinema as a Part of the US Culture

1.1. LEAD-IN

1. Read the following cinema questionnaire and think about your answers and reasons for them.

The Cinema Questionnaire

Can you think of a film which...

- you've seen several times? How many times did you see it?
- was incredibly funny? What was the funniest moment in it?
- made you feel good? In what way?
- made you cry? What was it about?
- sent you to sleep? What made it so boring?
- had a very sad ending? What was the story?
- made you buy / download the soundtrack? What piece of music was it?

Do you prefer...

- watching films at home or in the cinema? Why? What devices do you usually use to watch films at home?
- watching films on your own or with other people? Who with?
- watching films from your country, American films or other foreign films? What countries' films do you like best? Why?
- watching foreign films dubbed, with subtitles or in the original? Can you understand everything?

Have you seen a really good film this year?

- What kind of film is it?
- Is it based on some book or on a real event?
- Where and when is it set?
- Does it have a good plot?
- Who was it directed by?
- What actors are in it?
- Why did you like it?

Have you ever ...

- met an actor or a film director?
- seen a film being made?
- appeared in any kind of film?
- made a film or a video clip yourself?

2. In pairs, interview each other. Ask for and give as much information as you can. Do you have similar tastes? What do you have in common? Share with the rest of the class. Create a top-five list of the most popular films. What film genres appear to be most popular with your class?

3. Read the interview below. Which of the questions from the cinema questionnaire (task 1) did the person answer? What was the order of the questions?

Actually, I once met several film actors when they were making a TV film in my home town. I even had a part because they needed extras. I just had to walk up and down a street. But I think they edited me out of the final film!

It depends on the film. If it's a film that I think I'm really going to like, I'd rather go to the cinema to see it. If it's just entertainment, then I'm happy to wait and rent the DVD when it comes out or watch it on TV.

I normally prefer seeing foreign films with subtitles; even if I don't understand the language they're in. I think it's very important to hear the actors' voice and tone.

I've seen several films this year but nothing really fantastic.

Manhattan Murder Mysteries by Woody Allen made me laugh a lot. I thought it was very good.

Manchuga, a Chilean film, made me cry.

A film I have seen several times is *Grease*. It's my favourite film ever. I have seen it a thousand times and I know the script by heart.

4. Read the interview again and answer the questions.

- 1) How did he meet a lot of actors?
- 2) Did he appear in the film?
- 3) When does he prefer to see a film in the cinema?
- 4) How does he watch films at home?
- 5) Why does he prefer to see foreign films with subtitles?
- 6) Why did he like *Manhattan Murder Mysteries*?
- 7) Who was it directed by?
- 8) What country is the film *Manchuga* from?
- 9) Why did he see *Grease* so many times?

5. Explain the meanings of **highlighted** words from the interview in your own words.

6. Answer the questions below. If you don't know the answer, try to guess the best option.

How much do you know about the movies?

1. The first film came from:
a) The USA b) France c) Australia
2. Hollywood became important for film-making in:
a) the 1900s b) the 1920s c) the 1930s
3. The first movies with sound appeared in:
a) 1917 b) 1927 c) 1937
4. Rudolph Valentino was famous as:
a) a cowboy b) a comedian c) a lover
5. The actress Greta Garbo originally came from:
a) Germany b) Russia c) Sweden
6. The first Disney character was:
a) Donald Duck b) Mickey Mouse c) Snow White
7. The most expensive film of the twentieth century was:
a) Star Wars b) Batman Forever c) Titanic
8. The most successful film of the twentieth century was:
a) Citizen Kane b) Gone with the Wind c) Titanic
9. Most films are produced in:
a) the USA b) France c) India
10. People go to the cinema most often in:
a) The USA b) Lebanon c) India

7. Read the text and check your answers.

Did you know?

- The first film appeared in Paris in 1895, and it only lasted a few minutes, (the first full-length film didn't appear until 1905), but movies have been popular ever since.
- Between 1907 and 1913, Hollywood in southern California became the centre of the American (and international) film industry – the weather was perfect for making films outside!
- Until the late 1920s, movies were silent. Words on the screen told the important parts of the story and in each cinema a pianist played music at the same time as the film. Great stars of the silent movies included Rudolf Valentino, who was famous as a great lover and the London-born comedian Charlie Chaplin. The great Swedish actress, Greta Garbo, also started her career in silent movies.
- The first sound film, called *The Jazz Singer*, appeared in 1927, and starred Al Jolson. A few years later, the first colour movies appeared.
- Walt Disney designed his first cartoon character, Mickey Mouse, in 1928. Later, Donald Duck appeared, and in 1937 Disney made his first full-length cartoon film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.
- The most popular film of 1939, *Gone with the Wind*, starring Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh, was the most successful film of all time until *Titanic* appeared in 1997.
- *Titanic*, starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, was the most expensive film ever made – it cost \$200 million to make. It also made the most money (\$1.6 billion in its first year alone) and won the most Oscars of any film (eleven, including 'Best Film'). However, film critics often choose the 1941 film, *Citizen Kane*, starring Orson Welles, as the best film ever.
- You may think that the United States is the centre of the movie world, but that isn't completely true. The Indian film industry makes many more films each year than the Americans do (850 compared to 570 in the USA); the Lebanese go to the cinema much more often (35 times a year on average, compared to just 4 times a year in the US) and Belorussia has more cinemas per million people than the USA!

(Moor P., Cunningham, 2002)

8. Find out the answers to the movie quiz below.

1) What do these films have in common?

Pride and Prejudice

Bridget Jones' Diary

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

- a) They are all set in the 19th century.
b) They are all based on books.
c) They all won an Oscar for the best actress.
- 2) Which Oscar did all these films win?
Spiderman
the Lord of the Rings
the Matrix
a) best film
b) best soundtrack
c) best special effects
- 3) In which film did an Australian actor play the part of a Scottish soldier?
a) *Braveheart*
b) *Gladiator*
c) *Master and Commander*
- 4) Match the films with the cities they were set in.
Paris
Tokyo
London
a) *Lost in Translation*
b) *Notting Hill*
c) *Amélie*
- 5) Why is *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* called ‘a spaghetti western’?
a) Because most of the actors were Italian.
b) Because it was shot in Italy.
c) Because it was made by an Italian studio.
- 6) What is the boarding school called in the Harry Potter books?
a) Hogwarts
b) Hogarths
c) Howards
- 7) Which 2001 musical starred Nicole Kidman and Ewan McGregor?
a) *Chicago*
b) *Moulin Rouge*
c) *Cabaret*
- 8) Who composed the soundtrack for *Star Wars*?
a) John Williams
b) Ennio Morricone
c) Howard Shore

- 9) Which famous musical is based on the true story of the Von Trapp family?
- West Side Story*
 - The Sound of Music*
 - Phantom of the Opera*
- 10) Who played the part of James Bond in *Goldeneye*?
- Sean Connery
 - Roger Moore
 - Pierce Brosnan
- 11) Which actor was nominated seven times for an Oscar but never won it?
- Richard Burton
 - Humphrey Bogart
 - Cary Grant
- 12) What do these three films have in common?
- Reservoir Dogs*
Pulp Fiction
Kill Bill
- They all star John Travolta.
 - They were all directed by the same person.
 - They were all set in New York.

13) Match the films with these famous lines:

Lines	Films
1 'This Is My Neighbourhood, This Is My Street. My Name Is Lester Burnham. I'm 42 Years Old.'	a) <i>Star Wars</i>
2 'I'll Never Let Go. I'll Never Let Go, Jack.'	b) <i>Titanic</i>
3 'My Momma always said life was like a box of chocolates.'	c) <i>When Harry Met Sally</i>
4 'I'll have what she's having.'	d) <i>Forrest Gump</i>
5 'May the force be with you'	e) <i>American Beauty</i>

- 14) Correct these film titles:
- Close Encounters of the Fourth Kind
 - The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch and the Armchair
 - Dead Footballers' Society
 - Elephant Dundee
 - Four Weddings and Two Funerals
 - The Godmother
 - A Hundred and Three Dalmatians
 - Kill Jill
 - Mission Improbable
 - Silence of the Cows

1.2. THE HISTORY OF CINEMA

1. In small groups brainstorm the names of people in the history of cinematography. Exchange your ideas as a class.

2. Do you know the meaning of the following words and expressions? Working in pairs, try to give their definitions.

cartoon –
dream palace –
kinetoscope –
Nickelodeon –
shot –
talkies –
titles –
Walk of Fame –

3. Read the text below and check your answers.

The Development of the Seventh Art

Can you imagine life without films? Today we can go to the cinema or watch films on DVD or online whenever we want. We can even make films ourselves. But imagine the surprise and shock that people felt when they saw the first films in 1895! There was no sound, no colour and the films were very short: they lasted from 60 to 90 seconds! Besides, they did not tell a story. They were glimpses of real life: a military parade, a running horse, a boxing match, the ocean... One of the first films showed a train coming towards the camera. The audience panicked and ran away! The frightened people were sure that the train was coming into the theatre.

Many people contributed to the invention of the cinema – the brothers Louise Jean and Auguste Lumiere in France; Thomas Alva Edison in the United States; William Freise-Greene and Robert W. Paul in Great Britain. As a result, several different types of motion-picture cameras and projectors appeared in the mid-1890s.



One of the earliest motion-picture machines was Kinetoscope, invented by Thomas Alva Edison and W. Dickson. It was a cabinet showing unenlarged black-and-white films running about 90 seconds. An individual watched through a peep-hole as the film moved on spools. Kinetoscope parlours opened in several cities. However, they were soon replaced by projection machines that threw greatly enlarged pictures on a screen. These new machines allowed many people to watch one film at the same time.

The French Lumiere brothers were the first to show a film in public. It happened on December 28, 1895 in the

basement of a Paris café. During 1896 the Lumieres made more than 40 films. They showed everyday French life: the arrival of a train, a game of chess, the activity of a street life and the like.

Gradually films became longer and started to tell stories. Edwin S. Porter was one of the first directors who made such a film in 1903. It was *The Great Train Robbery*, the first Western in the history of the cinema. It told a primitive but dramatic story about bandits holding up a train. Gilbert M. Anderson (Bronco Billy) played in this film, as he said, 'everything but the camera'. He rode a horse. He was a passenger on the train who was killed



and he was also the bandit who shot him. This 11-minute film became a sensational hit. The Western was the only type of early film which was unique to the cinema. People knew comedies, romances, police stories and melodramas from the theatre. But the Western was new, and especially loved by children. Porter's film and the storytelling films that followed made the cinema still more popular.

The early films were shown in music halls, theatres, cafes and even shops. Travelling projectionists brought the films to smaller cities and country towns. In the United States, 'nickelodeons' began to appear. Nickelodeons were cinemas where people paid a nickel (5 cents) to see several short films. It was much cheaper than other forms of entertainment and everybody could afford it.

The cinema was the perfect popular entertainment. It was not expensive and, at first, the audience consisted mainly of workers. The rich and intellectual classes ignored it. They didn't think it was art. For example, the London *Times* wrote about one of the Lumiere brothers' first shows in 1896 and didn't mention the cinema again until 1904!

In the mid-1910s the first new theatres opened in the USA and Europe. They were called 'dream palaces' because of the fantastic luxury of the interiors. In 1911, the first studio was opened in Hollywood, Los Angeles. Film-makers soon realised that Southern California's climate was perfect for shooting films all the year round. And the area had settings for nearly any film – it had mountains, desert and ocean. Soon nearly all important American studios were in Hollywood and it became the film-making capital of the world. The people who ran Hollywood studios were businessmen and their main aim was to make money. They soon realized that the best way to do this was to standardize their films. When the audience liked a certain kind of film, the studios made many more of exactly the same kind. By the



1920s, 80 percent of world films were produced in Hollywood.

Silent films had orchestras, organists or pianists. Later, printed titles were invented. The titles gave dialogue, descriptions of action, or commentary.



By 1916, Charlie Chaplin had probably become the best-known person in the world. The public transformed him from a star into a mythic figure. Cartoons, poems and comic strips under the Chaplin name appeared in newspapers. Chaplin dolls, toys and boots were manufactured. This little man made the whole world laugh with his films. However, like many other silent film stars, he didn't succeed in 'talkies'.

The era of the talking film began in 1927 with the enormous success of Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer*. The film mostly told its story with titles, but it had three songs and a short dialogue. There were long queues in front of the Warner Theatre in New York... The silent film was dead within a year.

The first 100% sound film, *Lights of New York*, appeared in 1928. The first colour films were made in the 1930s. Before that films were usually tinted. The Soviet flag in Sergei Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* was tinted red. The introduction of colour was less revolutionary than the introduction of sound. The silent film soon disappeared, but the black- and-white films are made even today.

As the industry developed, it created a new phenomenon: the international film star. World travel was still slow and difficult in those days, but millions of people in different countries could see the same actors and actresses at the cinema. Their faces, and later their voices, were familiar to people in the countries they never visited.



It was an entirely new experience to see a 'star', someone to identify with and love from a distance. All over the world, from Paris to Tokyo, from London to New York, millions of people stood in long queues to see their favourite stars.

Mary Pickford, 'America's Sweetheart', was one of the early stars of silent cinema. She was also the first female millionaire. "I can't afford to work for only 10,000 dollars a week," she used to say. Thousands of young girls went to Hollywood hoping to become rich and famous like her.

A perfect example of a Hollywood studio star was Marilyn Monroe. Her great beauty made her a world-famous sex symbol. But in spite of her success in films, Monroe had a tragic life. She died at the age of 36 from an overdose of sleeping pills. Since her death she has become one of the most written-about film stars in history.

A famous star could make any film a certain success. So the studios went to great lengths to make their actors into stars. The publicity department gave them an image, and often a name. They dictated the clothes the stars wore, where they lived, what parties they went to. Studios often chose or wrote stories especially for their big stars. Sometimes a director would be brought in from another studio to do a film because a star liked him, or worked well with him. Or a cameraman would be brought in because he knew how to make the star look his or her best on screen.



The 1930s was the golden era of the Hollywood studio film. It was the decade of the great movie stars – Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Jean Harlow, Mae West, Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis, Cary Grant, Gary Cooper, Clark Gable – and of a new generation of great directors. It was also the time when two new kinds of films – the musical and the gangster film – first appeared on the screen.

At this time films started being given special prizes, named Academy Awards. The first Awards were given in May, 1929, and at first were awarded for silent films only. These awards are called ‘Oscars’ and they are supposed to have got their name because they looked like the Uncle Oscar of Margaret Herrick, a lady who worked in the Academy film library. In 1930 the award-giving was broadcast on the radio, and nowadays the academy awards are given every year by the US Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, the ceremony being watched on TV by millions of people all over the world.



The popularity of the cinema led to the first attacks against it. Church leaders condemned the new form. They thought that the cinema would steal souls and lead people away from religion. Indeed, early cinemas looked like temples, and people worshipped their favourite film stars.

The most important aspect of the cinema was that, for the price of a ticket, people could dream for a few hours. A little boy who went to a Saturday matinee in Manchester or Marseilles could imagine he was a courageous cowboy. A mother in Birmingham or Berlin could imagine she was Scarlett O’Hara in the arms of Rhett Butler.



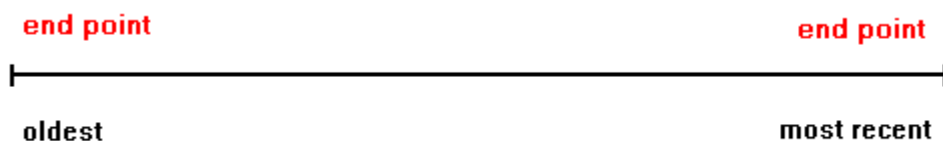
The golden age of the cinema continued through most of the 1940s. Audiences filled the ‘picture palaces’ in their towns, enjoying exciting films like *Citizen Kane*, *Casablanca* and *Double Indemnity*, and musicals like *Meet Me in St Louis* and *Easter Parade*.

Today, Hollywood is not what it was. Many studios have moved to other places. The film stars have also moved to areas like Beverly Hills and Malibu. But visitors to Hollywood today can go to the famous Chinese Theatre and see the footprints and autographs of famous film stars. They can go down the Walk of Fame and see the golden stars on the pavement.

In our day, no one disputes cinema's place as the 'seventh art'. According to Derek Malcolm of *The Guardian*, "Cinema has provided as many great artists over the last 100 years as literature, the theatre, and any of the other arts."

(From *Speakout. Журнал для изучающих английский язык*. 1998. № 5–6.)

4. Make a timeline of the cinematography development.



5. Mark the following sentences as true (T), false (F) or not stated (NS).

- 1) Cinematography appeared in the 18th century.
- 2) The first films lasted less than two minutes.
- 3) The earliest film-viewing device was called "Kinetoscope".
- 4) The first public cinema event took place in winter.
- 5) The first western showed only one actor.
- 6) Western was the only type of film in the beginning of the 20th century.
- 7) Going to the cinema in its early days was very expensive, so only rich and intellectual classes could afford it.
- 8) The only film-making studio in 1920s was situated in Hollywood.
- 9) Colour films appeared earlier than sound films.
- 10) Mary Pickford was the first film star.
- 11) The life of a film star was controlled thoroughly.
- 12) The first awards were given only to black-and-white films.

6. Answer the questions.

- 1) What was special about the first films?
- 2) How many people could watch a kinetoscope film?
- 3) Who showed the first film in public?
- 4) What was the name of the first western?
- 5) Why were early cinemas called 'nickelodeons'?
- 6) What society groups was cinema most popular with? Why?
- 7) Why did Hollywood become the centre of film-making?
- 8) What was the first sound film?
- 9) When were the first musicals released?
- 10) Why were Academy Awards called 'Oscars'?
- 11) Why did the Church dislike cinema?
- 12) What can visitors to Hollywood see and do there?