

## Why Movies?

Long before Edison projected a series of still images creating the illusion of motion, gathering to hear a story read or recited was commonplace around the world. Today families and friends frequently go to the movies or watch videos at home in order to enjoy each other's company while being entertained. Because movies are so popular, they are an appealing vehicle to use in teaching about stories, or what is formally called literary analysis.

Every story has a purpose. It uses techniques meant to impact its audience. Film is a medium with its own techniques. Since a movie is generally no more than 2½ hours in length, it follows the structure of a short story even when based on a novel. That is, the story is usually told from one point of view, follows a single major plotline, and has only a few well-defined central characters. This simplified structure should make it easier for students to dig deeper into the story elements.

Literature teaches. A well-written story appeals to our emotions. We find ourselves absorbing what it tells us is important in life and what behaviors are acceptable. This course is intended to help students understand the elements of good story-telling, identify and respond to messages even if they are not obvious at first, and to understand the techniques used by filmmakers to involve us emotionally as we watch. In this way, students will develop the ability to critique stories, whether on film or in print.

Learning to critique literature develops the ability to reflect on underlying messages, analyzing them from a moral point of view. This habit can be a safeguard against absorbing almost subconsciously the unwholesome messages Hollywood and books sometimes promote.

## Why These Movies?

Movies included in this course were chosen based on two primary criteria. First, the stories had to be well written in terms of literary elements. Most were based on novels or plays. Key characters are “fleshed out” (not left as stereotypes), plots are well developed and plausible, and the stories lend themselves to examination beyond the literal level. Second, the movies had to be filmed effectively, serving as examples for various film techniques. For this reason, **it is important that the specific version of a**

**movie listed here be the one viewed.** For example, after watching the remake of *A Man For All Seasons*, which is longer and includes all of the original play, we felt that the absence of certain film techniques made it less effective in drawing the viewer into the life and world of Sir Thomas More than the original, shorter, film. Therefore, the earlier version was chosen for this course.

**Note:** The Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) rating is given for each film if available, although most of these movies were released before a rating code was deemed necessary. PG-13 is the most mature rating given any film studied in this book. However, if you are concerned about any movie's suitability, please preview it before watching it with a student.

### **Will I Cover Everything Necessary for an English Course?**

According to the recommendations of the National Council of Teachers of English, composition should make up fifty percent of a high school English course with the remaining fifty percent made up primarily of the analysis of literature, allowing for some attention to vocabulary and grammar as needed by the student.

In this course, movies provide the short stories—the literature. The questions for discussion guide students into analysis of literary elements. That discussion should also include any vocabulary from the film or discussion questions that the teacher believes the students will find unfamiliar. It is assumed that by high school, students will be able to recall and summarize the story watched or read. Therefore, the emphasis in this course is on directing students to make inferences, draw conclusions, and identify and interpret figurative language and symbolism as they study character, plot, theme, and various literary and film techniques.

Each lesson contains three questions for compositions. The writing process should be used in order to fulfill the English requirement. That is, the student writes a first draft and the teacher offers constructive suggestions for further revisions until the final draft is considered by the teacher to be well done. Analytical skills will also be honed as students organize and support their points. Grammar related errors should be pointed out by the teacher and corrected by the student for the final draft.

If instructions are followed, this course will not only fulfill English requirements, but will also develop skills that the student will apply to stories and movies on his own.

If the student needs extra practice with composition, use appropriate discussion questions for further writing assignments.

### **What about an Honors Course?**

For college bound students who want an Honors English listing on their transcript, a minimum of five activities chosen from “Activities for Extended Study” should be completed along with the regular course requirements.

### **How Do I Adjust This Course for a Student with Special Needs?**

All questions, even those for compositions, should be answered orally. The student may dictate or write just his thesis statement and points of support for two of the three composition questions. The teacher should help the student work from rough draft to finished product on just one composition question per movie, allowing the student to dictate if writing is too difficult.

### **How Do I Use This Course in Grades 7 and 8?**

Study only the first six movies unless the student is considered advanced. In that case, stop when it appears that the questions become too complex even with teacher guidance during discussion. Take as much time as necessary to complete each lesson. Use extended activity ideas, additional short stories, and/or short novels to be read and discussed to complete the literature portion of the curriculum. Add regular spelling and vocabulary practice and extra editing practice to hone grammar skills.

### **Where Do I Find the Movies for this Course?**

Many of these movies regularly appear on television and can be recorded for home use. Some public libraries carry classic movies. Most titles should be available for rental at such chains as Blockbuster and Westcoast Video. They are also available for rental by mail (see below). **Be sure to check the date of the movie listed in this course in order to rent the correct version.**