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LIVE CLASSES

Movies & Meaning

Mr. David Webb

Syllabus

2024-2025

Description:

This course will focus on the art and history of American motion pictures, from their silent beginnings through the golden age of Hollywood to the present day. Along the way, we will learn how movies are made, how the film business has adapted and changed over time, and how movies affect us, the audience.

Class topics include overviews of film genres from musicals and westerns to film noir and science fiction, the elements of film production such as acting, directing, cinematography, film editing, and music, and the historical events that have shaped American movies and vice versa.

Students will also learn to evaluate a film from a biblical worldview perspective. They will learn how to recognize what a movie is really saying through the filmmakers' use of story, style, and theme. They will learn to think and talk about a film in a way that goes beyond its entertainment value, thus enabling students to engage and influence the cultural conversation as media-wise Christians.

Prerequisites:

None.

Course Materials:

- No textbook is required for this course.
- One or more PDFs of assigned reading will be provided to students each week.
- Each week, students will be assigned a specific film to watch outside of class and should be prepared to discuss the movie at the next class

meeting. A list of streaming services known to carry the film will be provided that week, but students and their parents will be responsible for accessing the film and for any rental fees or purchases required to watch the film. Although you will be able to find some of these titles for free, you can expect to pay an average of \$2.99 to \$3.99 per movie to stream most of the films on Amazon or YouTube.

Course Details:

What would a film class be without watching movies? Pretty boring, that's what! This class will NOT be boring. During this course, students will watch some of the greatest and most entertaining movies ever made. Does that mean you will love every movie you watch for this class? Not likely. Each of us responds differently to a movie, no matter how objectively good or bad it may be. We will explore why this is so along the way, but know going in that, you're probably not going to like every single movie you're assigned.

How were these films selected?

Some of the movies you will watch are outstanding cinematic achievements that have stood the test of time to become touchstones of quality. Some of the films were chosen because they represent a particular milestone or advancement in the making of movies. Others have been selected because they captured defining moments, reflected significant trends, or depicted prevailing attitudes—for better or worse—in our cultural history. In every case, the motion picture is worth the investment of your time, attention, and consideration.

How should I watch the movies?

The simplest answer: On the biggest screen available with the clearest picture possible, preferably in high-definition and without commercial interruptions.

Motion pictures are primarily a visual medium created to be seen in a group environment where the film has your (mostly) undivided attention. Ideally, this class would be meeting in a state-of-the-art theater, or at least a lovingly restored movie palace, where we can watch the films the way they were meant to be shown. While we are blessed to live in a time when technology allows us unprecedented access to much of classic cinema, we are generally limited to watching these movies on whatever screen is immediately available to us. So yes, you may choose to watch the assigned movies on your phone or tablet. However, as a rule, the larger the screen, the better your experience of the film will be. Also, keep an eye out for special showings of classic movies in your local movie theaters.

Why aren't we watching the movies during class?

Due to time constraints and the inherent limitations of the virtual classroom—i.e., bandwidth—it's not practical to watch full feature-length movies in class. That said, we will be watching scenes from films you need to be aware of when studying the history of motion pictures.

How do I find the assigned movies in order to watch them?

Your syllabus includes a tentative list of the films you will be required to watch for this course. It's likely that at least half of the films on the list will be shown on the Turner Classic Movies (TCM) network between now and December. If TCM is available as part of your cable, satellite, or streaming service, you will be able to record and watch many of the assigned films at no extra cost with a bit of planning. Also, many public libraries offer a quality selection of classic films on DVD and Blu-ray. For example, all twenty-nine feature films on the list are available through the Nashville Public Library here in Tennessee. Otherwise, you will likely need to stream the movies to the device of your choosing. The week before you are required to watch a given title, your instructor will email you with a list of online providers currently streaming

that movie. If the film is not available on a streaming service to which your family subscribes, your best option will probably be to rent the film through Amazon or YouTube, where nearly all the films will be available at a very reasonable rate.

NOTE: Please do not download or stream a movie from any website that is not legally authorized to distribute the film. To do so is digital piracy, a crime punishable by severe fines and imprisonment. Worse, it's a violation of the eighth commandment and a sin.

Will students be required to watch R-rated movies for class?

No. In fact, all films assigned for this course were originally released prior to the 1968 debut of the MPAA rating system that opened the floodgates for offensive content in American cinema.

NOTE: **Please be aware that non-graphic scenes from a few PG-13 and R-rated films may be shown in class.** For example, a suspenseful clip from Jurassic Park rated PG-13, was used in last year's class to illustrate the possibilities and limitations of computer-generated visual effects. During the lecture on gangster films, a clip from The Godfather rated R, was shown to illustrate the movie's use of traditional genre themes established in the early 1930s. All clips shown in class will be free of profanity, sexuality, and explicit violence. Please contact the instructor directly if you have concerns about the use of such clips in class.

Assignment Structure:

Weekly Movie Reports

After watching the assigned movie, the student will complete a form containing between five and seven questions about the film and the worldviews found therein. The group discussion that begins each class is

based entirely on that week's movie report, so answering these questions thoroughly will prepare the student to contribute to the group discussion. Each report is worth 50 points.

Short-Answer Assignments

Each week, students will research and identify up to a dozen names, events, and/or terms from American film history. Each assignment is worth up to 50 points. These weekly exercises will familiarize students with key people, films, and terminology related to that week's subject.

NOTE: Most of the material for the tests will be taken from these worksheets. Because students will be allowed to refer to these worksheets while taking a test, they are encouraged to be thorough and accurate when completing these assignments.

Class Participation

Students should come to class prepared to discuss the movie they were assigned to watch the previous week. Students will be able to award themselves 25 points each week they attend the lecture and contribute to the discussion. If students are unable to attend the live lecture, they may award themselves 25 points after viewing the class recording.

Reading

There is no textbook for this course. However, some reading will be required in the form of articles assigned by the instructor and posted on the Canvas course site. For example, the week they watch Frankenstein, students will read about the memorable design of the monster and makeup artist Jack Pierce's contributions to film art. 25 points will be awarded when the student completes the reading and verifies this on the Canvas course site.

Tests

Two tests will be assigned during the school year. Each test will cover the movies, lectures, and short answer homework assignments from that semester. REMINDER: Students are allowed to use their completed Short Answer worksheets for reference while taking the test.

Final Essay — OPTIONAL

This is an optional assignment. Parents, you may wish to require the assignment to add to the academic rigor of the course, which is highly recommended if your student is planning to attend college. If the student submits an essay by the deadline, the instructor will grade the essay and award the student up to 500 bonus points. The essay will consist of the student's analysis of a single film that will be assigned for this purpose. The film title and essay parameters will be provided by February 1. The essay must be submitted by May 1 in order to be graded by the instructor.

Final class scores will be based on the following activities:

- **Activity Points Weekly Movie Reports** 1500 (50 points each week)
- **Short-Answer Homework** 1500 (50 points each week)
- **Class Participation** 750 (25 points each week)
- **Reading** 750 (25 points each week)
- **Tests** (x2) 500 (each test worth 250 points)

Total Possible Points 5,000

Divide the student's cumulative point total by 5,000 to determine the student's final percentage score. As for a letter grade for the student's records, it will be up to the parent to assign a grade based on the student's scoring percentage. A score that earns a B+ to one parent may be an A- to another parent. Please keep in mind that Mr. Webb is merely the lecturer; the parent is still the official instructor, counselor, and principal of your home school.

Neither Apologia Live Classes nor its faculty intends to usurp the vital role of the parent in home education.

Class Canvas Portal:

Students can log in to class meetings, view important class information, submit assignments, and view their grades on the Canvas course portal. Additional information on Canvas and its use can be found on the portal at <https://apologia.instructure.com/>.

Each week, the lecture will be recorded. A link to the recording will then be posted on the Canvas course site. If you cannot access a recording at any time, contact the instructor, and he will provide you with a direct link to the recording. Apologia students with accounts in good standing will have access to the videos for the duration of the school year. Students may watch the recordings if they have missed a class or if they wish to watch a lecture again.

Weekly Live Lecture:

The class will meet for live lectures online at 1:00 p.m. Eastern on Thursdays. Class meetings will run approximately 90 minutes.

The schedule of films and lecture topics is provided below. The class calendar is also available on the course Canvas page.

NOTE: All dates, topics, and films are subject to change.

How the Schedule Works

Each class meeting begins with a group discussion about the movie you were assigned to watch that week. Following the discussion, the instructor will present a lecture on a new topic. Over the next seven days, students will watch the next assigned movie, fill out the weekly movie report, complete the

short-answer assignment, and do the assigned reading. The next class meeting will begin with a group discussion of the movie and homework, and the cycle begins again.

Worldview Topics

The lecture schedule specifies the topics we will discuss related to the movie industry, film history, motion picture production, and film appreciation.

However, we will also be discussing movies from a worldview perspective.

Worldview-related topics to be covered include:

- How to watch a movie and discern what the filmmakers are really saying about truth, love, character, and heroism
- How movies and their content affect the culture, both to its benefit and its detriment
- How can Christians draw upon popular movies to engage this part of the cultural conversation and even use them to point others to Christ?
- Where should Christians draw the line in choosing what to watch?

The following is a schedule of lecture topics and films planned for this school year. Again, all titles are subject to change. If a scheduled movie is replaced with a different title, parents and students will be notified well in advance.

- AUG 22 - Silents Are Golden: The Early Days of Motion Pictures City
 - “Lights” (1931)
- AUG 29 - What’s a Genre? / The Genius of the Studio System
 - “Frankenstein” (1931)
- SEPT 5 - From Stop-Motion to CGI: Milestones in Visual Effects
 - “King Kong” (1933)
- SEPT 12 - What Makes a Film a Classic? / The Production Code of 1930
 - “A Night at the Opera” (1935)
- SEPT 19 - Dancing Cheek to Cheek: The Early Years of the Movie Musical
 - “Top Hat” (1935)

- SEPT 26 - Walt Disney and the Story of Animation
 - “Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs” (1937)
- OCT 3 - Knowing the Score: The Art of Movie Music
 - “The Adventures of Robin Hood” (1938)
- OCT 10 - Madcap Romance: Screwball Comedy of the 1930s and '40s
 - “Bringing Up Baby” (1938)
- OCT 17 - Floating Break: NO CLASS
- OCT 24 - Gangsters in the Movies: Good Fellas or Public Enemies?
 - “The Roaring Twenties” (1938)
- OCT 31 - Where the Story Begins: Screenwriting and Screenwriters
 - “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” (1939)
- NOV 7 - Glorious Technicolor / The Art of Production Design
 - “Gone with the Wind” (1939)
- NOV 14 - Hollywood Goes to War / Going to the Movies in the 1940s
 - “Sergeant York” (1941)
- NOV 21 - The Star System and the Hollywood Idol Makers
 - “Casablanca” (1942)
- NOV 28 - Thanksgiving Week: NO CLASS
- DEC 5 - The Sartorial Art of Costume Design Now
 - “Voyager” (1942)
- DEC 12 - Method and Madness: Acting on Film
 - “It’s a Wonderful Life” (1946)
- DEC 19 - Christmas Break: NO CLASS
- DEC 26 - Christmas Break: NO CLASS
- JAN 2 - Christmas Break: NO CLASS
- JAN 9 - Out of the Shadows: An Introduction to Film Noir
 - “Double Indemnity” (1944)
- JAN 16 - The Timeless Beauty of Black-and-White
 - “The Ghost and Mrs. Muir” (1947)
- JAN 23 - Public Paranoia and Science Fiction in the 1950s

- “The Day the Earth Stood Still” (1951)
- JAN 30 - MGM and the Golden Age of the Movie Musical
 - “Singin’ in the Rain” (1952)
- FEB 6 - The Wild, Wild Western
 - “High Noon” (1952)
- FEB 13 - Go Big or Go Home: CinemaScope, 3D, and the Threat of Television
 - “Hondo” (1953)
- FEB 20 - Floating Break: NO CLASS
- FEB 27 - The Auteur Theory: Is the Director the Author of the Movie?
 - “Rear Window” (1954)
- MAR 6 - The Audience Is Listening: Designing a World Through Sound
 - “Forbidden Planet” (1956)
- MAR 13 - Cinematography: Picturing the Possibilities
 - “12 Angry Men” (1957)
- MAR 20 - Danger Men (and Women): Hollywood’s Greatest Stunts
 - “Ben-Hur” (1959)
- MAR 27 - When the Shooting Stops: The Importance of the Film Editor
 - “North by Northwest” (1959)
- APR 3 - Play It Again—and Again: Remakes, Series, and Sequels
 - “The Magnificent Seven” (1960)
- APR 10 - Spring Break: NO CLASS
- APR 17 - Spring Break: NO CLASS
- APR 24 - The Black Experience in Hollywood
 - “Lilies of the Field” (1963)
- MAY 1 - Pandora’s Box Office: The Failure of the MPAA Ratings System
 - “The Great Escape” (1963)
- MAY 8 - How “Jaws” Created the Summer Blockbuster

Live Lecture Attendance Policy:

Students should attend all live online lectures, if possible. If the student misses a live lecture, he or she should watch the recording at his or her earliest convenience. In addition to the lectures, the instructor may also discuss due dates, holidays, and other important course information during class. NOTE: If, for any reason, the instructor is unable to present a lecture at the regularly scheduled time, a recorded lecture or makeup date will be provided. Students and parents will be notified as early as possible if this becomes necessary.

Conduct & Academic Dishonesty:

A virtual class environment requires special rules to minimize distractions and enable everyone to enjoy the maximum benefit of attending class. Thank you in advance for honoring these rules and working to make our class a great experience for everyone!

1. Please log in to Zoom meetings using your first name and last initial. This will assist the instructor in facilitating class discussion.
2. Come to class prepared to actively share, discuss, and participate. We all get more out of this class—and the movies we watch—when everyone contributes to the discussion.
3. Make sure you have watched the movie and thoroughly answered all questions on the weekly film report, as this will prepare you to contribute to the discussion.
4. If possible, join the class at least five to ten minutes before the designated lecture time. Each week before class, the instructor will show a short video related to the film you've watched or the topic under discussion. We will also be watching some landmark short films and cartoons, as these were once a part of every film program in movie theaters.

5. You may use the chat box to talk freely with other students prior to the start of class discussion and lecture. Please do NOT type in the chat box during the lecture UNLESS you have a question or are answering a question that has been asked by the instructor.
6. Do not criticize your fellow students or disparage their comments. Movies are a highly subjective art, and everyone is entitled to his or her opinion.
7. Keep all conversations appropriate for a Christian classroom.
8. If you have a question during the lecture, type your question into the chat box. The instructor will pause to answer your question if the timing is appropriate. The instructor will be available to address any unanswered questions after the lecture.
9. Give the instructor your full attention and do not use mobile devices or tablets, play games, use social media, or surf online during the lecture.
10. If you must leave class early, please send the instructor a private message before exiting.
11. If you join a meeting late, you may jump into a discussion already in progress, but please do not disrupt the class if the instructor is currently lecturing. It will be your responsibility to watch the recording later to catch up on anything you missed.
12. For privacy reasons, because the lectures and discussions are being recorded, we will use microphones during discussion time but no cameras. If your device is not equipped with a microphone, you can still participate in discussions using the chat box.
13. The instructor will answer questions regarding assignments, Canvas, and other “housekeeping” matters after the lecture. Please save all such questions to ask at that time. Or send the instructor an email to ask your question.

Help and Questions Outside of Live Class:

You can contact your instructor at mrwebb@apologia.com.