

Curriculum Development  
In the Fairfield Public Schools

**FAIRFIELD PUBLIC SCHOOLS**  
FAIRFIELD, CONNECTICUT

**UNDERSTANDING FILM**

Board of Education Approved 05/23/2006

## **Understanding Film**

### **Statement of Purpose**

This course teaches students to read visual texts in analytical ways as they situate those texts within a historical or cultural context. Students will develop their critical thinking by broadening their worldview, challenging their assumptions, and reaching new conclusions and enriched understandings.

### **Audience**

Grade 12 or Grade 11, in addition to a full year course.

### **Prerequisites**

Successful completion of sophomore English if a junior and junior English if a senior.

### **Course Description**

This course is not about viewing films for a few months; it is about spending a few months of preparation for a lifetime of viewing films with a critical eye and an intelligent mind. Because we live in an information culture that is increasingly dominated by the image, students need to develop habits of perception, analysis, judgment, and selectivity which improve their capacity of processing, analyzing, and evaluating visual data. Because movies, videos, and DVD's are such a part of the students' lives, it is important that students acquire visual literacy. In order to gain this visual literacy, students need to learn how to read a film, to understand the art of watching a film, and to recognize the rhetoric of visual language. Understanding Film uses the medium of film to teach the strands of the English curriculum. Writing, reading, viewing, researching, discussion, and critical thinking occur on a daily basis. Fictional and non-fictional reading will be required. Students must pay careful attention to the correct use of grammar as they produce writing that is well organized, coherent, and supported. The elements of character development, imagery, thematic structure, and point of view will be explored through the medium of film. Students will view films to understand human behavior so that they can make better choices in their own lives. Students will also complete an Independent Study Project in the spring.

### **Goals**

Students will:

- become visually literate by developing skills in "reading films".
- examine and question their own assumptions, assumptions implied within films, and assumptions of the culture which produced the films, in order to develop new perceptions or ways of seeing.
- critically analyze and evaluate the artistic and cinematic value of films and recognize film as an art form.
- analyze films within historical or cultural contexts of particular times in American history.
- develop sensitivity for cultures, traditions, and values other than their own through the study of foreign films.
- analyze, synthesize, and make correlations while they are reading, discussing, and writing about films in order to interpret films and evaluate the ideas which films offer.

- write in expository modes of compare/contrast, cause/effect, fact/opinion, and illustration.
- conduct research about films

### **Course Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- explore their prior knowledge about film.
- identify reasons for studying film.
- identify the fictional and dramatic elements within a film.
- practice film-reading strategies.
- identify their tastes in films.
- analyze and recognize their own assumptions and question their own thinking.
- demonstrate their knowledge about paradigms.
- demonstrate knowledge of the structure and organization of a formal analysis of a film.
- demonstrate knowledge of the elements of a film history paper.
- demonstrate the knowledge of the elements of an ideological essay.
- demonstrate knowledge of appropriate sources of auteur criticism.
- shape and explore questions about the filmmaking, its historical context, and the responses of critics and scholars.
- understand and appreciate the art form of silent film, its era, and its star, Charlie Chaplin.
- demonstrate an understanding of the factors that label a film “controversial”.
- explore the reasons, causes, and effects of censorship.
- analyze their own thinking on censorship.
- research information about the time in which a movie was made and the historical time period of the film’s story.
- identify the values of Americans portrayed in the film.
- compare and contrast the subject matter within the films with emphasis on censorship restrictions as well as historical events.
- demonstrate knowledge of the literary elements within the film (character development, conflict, point of view, thematic structure, and imagery).
- integrate textual support to illustrate their thesis statements.
- demonstrate effective expository writing which contains an honest voice, unity, coherence, and completeness.
- identify the elements of a type of film (e.g. film noir, combat films, westerns, social problem films, etc.).
- examine the fictional and dramatic elements within a film.
- identify the values of Americans portrayed in films.
- “read” a documentary understanding the message implied and articulate divergent positions.
- analyze humor, graphics, music, and statistics used to present as well as alter facts.
- analyze the effectiveness of a documentary, the reliability of data, and its impact on the audience.

- deepen an awareness of particular cultures, traditions, and values other than their own as they analyze themes.
- compare and contrast another culture and society to America.
- analyze and recognize their initial assumptions.
- examine the assumptions made within the film.
- evaluate their initial assumptions.
- reflect on their new conclusions.
- compare and contrast a novel to its film version.
- analyze the reader's reaction and the viewer's reaction.
- incorporate knowledge gained through the curriculum of the Understanding Film course.
- form individual inquiry.
- evaluate and synthesize information.
- research print and non-print sources.
- connect new knowledge to the focus questions of the course.
- present information to an audience.

### **Skills Objectives**

Students will:

- use Internet effectively for research.
- cite sources appropriately (MLA).
- demonstrate sentence variety (coordination and subordination; use of sentence fragments) in their writing.
- demonstrate consistency of voice.
- punctuate restrictive and non- restrictive clauses correctly.
- demonstrate appropriate diction by avoiding clichés, jargon, slang, and colloquialisms; using vivid language.
- read English subtitles while understanding the action within the film

### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

Students will explain and explore their own and others' aesthetic reactions to texts.

Students will analyze literary conventions and devices an author uses and how they contribute meaning and appeal.

**Students recognize and appreciate that contemporary and classical literature has shaped human thought.**

Students will discuss, analyze and evaluate how characters deal with the diversity of human experience and conflict.

Students will compare/ contrast and evaluate ideas, themes and/or issues across classical and contemporary texts.

Students will create responses to texts and examine each work's contributions to an understanding of human experience across cultures.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate the basic beliefs, perspectives and assumptions underlying an author's work.

Students will discuss how the experiences of an author influence the text.

Students will discuss how the experiences of a reader influence the interpretation of a text.

Students will analyze and evaluate themes and connections that cross cultures.

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

*Communicating with Others - Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.*

**Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.**

Students will listen to or read a variety of genres to use as models for writing in different modes.

Students will use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository or poetic writing.

**Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.**

Students will determine purpose, point of view and audience, and choose an appropriate written, oral or visual format.

Students will apply the most effective processes to create and present a written, oral or visual piece.

Students will revise texts for organization, elaboration, fluency and clarity.

Students will research information from multiple sources for a specific purpose.

Students will evaluate the validity of primary and secondary sources of information to authenticate research.

Students will publish and/or present final products in a myriad of ways, including the use of the arts and technology.

*English Language Conventions - Students apply the conventions of Standard English in oral and written communication.*

**Students use knowledge of their language and culture to improve competency in English.**

Students will read, listen to and tell stories from a variety of cultures, and identify the similarities and differences in the way language is used.

**Students use Standard English for composing and revising written text.**

Students will demonstrate proficient use of proper mechanics, usage and spelling skills.

Students will use resources for proofreading and editing.

**Information and Technology Standards (to be added)**

**Essential Questions**

- How do we understand what we read?
- How does literature enrich our lives?
- How do we write, speak, and present effectively?
- How do we use the English language appropriately to speak and write?

**Focus Questions**

- Why study film?
- How does one read a film?
- What is the art of watching a movie?
- How can recognition of our attitudes and belief system allow us to change our assumptions?
- How does one write about films?
- How can one respond in writing about films in order to connect to the films and develop critical thinking skills?
- How has censorship impacted movies and how do these restrictions reflect a society's values and morals?
- How can viewing past and present American films deepen our understanding of our own country?
- What can movies tell us about the world we live in?
- How can viewing and understanding international films help us deepen our awareness of other cultures and societies?
- What happens when a novel is made into a movie?

## **UNITS of STUDY**

### **Unit 1: Building the Foundation for Film Study**

#### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

*Communicating with Others - Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.*

**Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.**

Students will research information from multiple sources for a specific purpose.

#### **Essential Questions**

- How does literature enrich our lives?
- How do we write, speak, and present effectively?

#### **Focus Questions**

- Why study film?
- How does one read a film?
- What is the art of watching a movie?

#### **Core Topic**

- Building the Foundation for Film Study

#### **Unit Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- explore their prior knowledge about film.
- identify reasons for studying film.
- identify the fictional and dramatic elements within a film
- practice film-reading strategies.

#### **Assessment**

- Written responses

#### **Pacing**

1 week

## **Unit 2: Evaluating Our Beliefs**

### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will discuss how the experiences of a reader influence the interpretation of a text.

### **Essential Question**

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### **Focus Question**

- How can recognition of our attitudes and belief system allow us to change our assumptions?

### **Core Topic**

- Evaluating our Beliefs

### **Unit Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- identify their tastes in films.
- analyze and recognize their own assumptions and question their own thinking.
- demonstrate their knowledge about paradigms.

### **Assessments**

- Paradigm model, demonstrating initial tastes and assumptions
- Written reflection

### **Pacing**

1 week



## **Unit 3: Film Writing Strategies**

### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

### **Essential Question**

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### **Focus Questions**

- How does one write about films?
- How can one respond in writing about films in order to connect to the films and develop critical thinking skills?

### **Core Topic**

- Film Writing Strategies

### **Unit Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- demonstrate knowledge of the structure and organization of a formal analysis of a film.
- demonstrate knowledge of the elements of a film history paper.
- demonstrate the knowledge of the elements of an ideological essay.
- demonstrate knowledge of appropriate sources of auteur criticism
- shape and explore questions about the filmmaking, its historical context, and the responses of critics and scholars.

### **Assessments**

- Create questions for future use in the auteur criticism paper
- Create questions to be used in an analytical study

### **Pacing**

1 week

## Unit 4: Silent Films Say So Much

### English Standards

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

Students will analyze literary conventions and devices an author uses and how they contribute meaning and appeal.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

### Essential Question

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### Focus Question

- How can viewing past and present American films deepen our understanding of our own country?

### Core Topic

- Silent Films Say So Much

### Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- understand and appreciate the art form of silent film, its era, and its star, Charlie Chaplin.
- demonstrate an understanding of the factors that label a film “controversial”.

### Skills Objective

Students will:

- demonstrate sentence variety (coordination and subordination; use of sentence fragment) in their writing.

### Assessments

- Character study
- Personal reflection

### Pacing

3 weeks

Understanding Film

## Unit 5: Censorship Restrictions

### English Standards

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate the basic beliefs, perspectives and assumptions underlying an author's work.

Students will discuss how the experiences of an author influence the text.

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

### Essential Question

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### Focus Question

- How has censorship impacted movies and how do these restrictions reflect a society's values and morals?

### Core Topic

- Censorship Restrictions

### Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- explore the reasons, causes, and effects of censorship.
- analyze their own thinking on censorship

### Assessment

- Create and implement survey; record data

### Pacing

1 week

## **Unit 6: Traveling Through American History with Films**

### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate the basic beliefs, perspectives and assumptions underlying an author's work.

Students will discuss how the experiences of an author influence the text.

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

*Communicating with Others - Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.*

**Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.**

Students will use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository or poetic writing.

**Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.**

Students will apply the most effective processes to create and present a written, oral or visual piece.

Students will revise texts for organization, elaboration, fluency and clarity.

### **Essential Questions**

- How does literature enrich our lives?
- How do we write, speak, and present effectively?

### **Focus Question**

- How can viewing past and present American films deepen our understanding of our own country?

## **Core Topic**

- Traveling Through American History with Films

## **Unit Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- research information about the time in which a movie was made and the historical time period of the film's story.
- identify the values of Americans portrayed in film.
- demonstrate knowledge of the literary elements within the film (character development, conflict, point of view, thematic structure, and imagery).
- compare and contrast the subject matter within the films with emphasis on censorship restrictions as well as historical events.
- integrate textual support to illustrate their thesis statements.
- demonstrate effective expository writing which contains an honest voice, unity, coherence, and completeness.

## **Skill Objectives**

Students will:

- use the Internet effectively for research.
- cite sources appropriately (MLA).
- demonstrate consistency of voice.

## **Assessments**

- Write an auteur criticism on a director such as Elia Kaza or Peter Fonda
- Write a comparison/contrast essay on Orson Welles and William Randolph Hearst with text support, critical analysis, and correct citation
- Write a cause and effect essay from one of the films with text support, critical analysis, and correct citation

## **Pacing**

4 weeks

## Unit 7: Studying Film Genres

### English Standards

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will identify the various conventions within a genre and apply this understanding to the evaluation of the text.

Students will analyze literary conventions and devices an author uses and how they contribute meaning and appeal.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate the basic beliefs, perspectives and assumptions underlying an author's work.

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

### Essential Question

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### Focus Question

- How can viewing past and present American films deepen our understanding of our own country?

### Core Topic

- Studying Film Genres

### Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- identify the elements of a type of film (e.g. film noir, combat films, westerns, social problem films, etc.).
- examine the fictional and dramatic elements within a film.
- identify the values of Americans portrayed in films.

### Skill Objective

Students will

- punctuate restrictive and non-restrictive clauses correctly.

### Assessment

- Test about the genre and the ideas in the film

### Pacing

1 week

Understanding Film

## Unit 8: Beware of the Documentary

### English Standards

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate the basic beliefs, perspectives and assumptions underlying an author's work.

Students will interpret, analyze and evaluate the influence of culture, history and ethnicity on themes and issues in literature.

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

### Essential Question

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### Focus Question

- What can movies tell us about the world we live in?

### Core Topic

- Beware of the Documentary

### Unit Objectives

Students will be able to read a documentary by:

- “read” a documentary by understanding the message implied and articulate divergent positions.
- analyze the effectiveness of a documentary, the reliability of data, and its impact on the audience.
- analyze humor, graphics, music, and statistics used to present as well as alter facts.

### Skill Objective

Students will:

- demonstrate appropriate diction by avoiding clichés, jargons, slang, and colloquialisms, using vivid language.

### Assessments

- Data analysis
- Written reflection on their changed assumptions about documentaries

### Pacing

1 week

## **Unit 9: Learn About Our World Neighbors Through Film**

### **English Standards**

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize and appreciate that contemporary and classical literature has shaped human thought.**

Students will discuss, analyze and evaluate how characters deal with the diversity of human experience and conflict.

Students will compare/ contrast and evaluate ideas, themes and/or issues across classical and contemporary texts.

Students will create responses to texts and examine each work's contributions to an understanding of human experience across cultures.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will analyze and evaluate themes and connections that cross cultures.

*Communicating with Others - Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.*

**Students use descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and poetic modes.**

Students will listen to or read a variety of genres to use as models for writing in different modes.

Students will use the appropriate features of persuasive, narrative, expository or poetic writing.

*English Language Conventions - Students apply the conventions of Standard English in oral and written communication.*

**Students use knowledge of their language and culture to improve competency in English.**

Students will read, listen to and tell stories from a variety of cultures, and identify the similarities and differences in the way language is used.

**Students use Standard English for composing and revising written text.**

Students will demonstrate proficient use of proper mechanics, usage and spelling skills.

Students will use resources for proofreading and editing.

### **Essential Questions**

- How does literature enrich our lives?
- How do we write, speak, and present effectively?



- How do we use the English language appropriately to speak and write?

### **Focus Question**

- How can viewing and understanding international films help us deepen our awareness of other cultures and societies?

### **Core Topic**

- Learn About Our World Neighbors Through Film

### **Unit Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- deepen an awareness of cultures, traditions, and values other than their own as they analyze themes.
- compare and contrast another culture and society to America.
- analyze and recognize their initial assumptions.
- examine the assumptions made within the film.
- evaluate their initial assumptions.
- reflect on their new conclusions.

### **Skill Objectives**

Students will:

- demonstrate consistency of voice.
- read English subtitles while understanding the action within the film

### **Assessments**

- Exploratory essay
- Comparison/contrast essay

### **Pacing**

3 weeks

## Unit 10: Novels to Films

### English Standards

*Exploring and Responding to Literature - Students read and respond to classical and contemporary texts from many cultures and literary periods.*

**Students recognize how literary devices and conventions engage the reader.**

Students will explain and explore their own and others' aesthetic reactions to texts.

**Students recognize that readers and authors are influenced by individual, social, cultural and historical contexts.**

Students will evaluate the effectiveness of the choices that authors, illustrators and filmmakers make to express political and social issues.

### Essential Question

- How does literature enrich our lives?

### Focus Question

- What happens when a novel is made into a movie?

### Core Topic

- Novels to Films

### Unit Objectives

Students will be able to:

- compare and contrast a novel to its film version.
- analyze the reader's reaction and the viewer's reaction

### Assessment

- Tests on novels

### Pacing

1 week

## Unit 11: Utilizing the Teacher

### English Standards

*Communicating with Others - Students produce written, oral and visual texts to express, develop and substantiate ideas and experiences.*

**Students prepare, publish and/or present work appropriate to audience, purpose and task.**

Students will determine purpose, point of view and audience, and choose an appropriate written, oral or visual format.

Students will apply the most effective processes to create and present a written, oral or visual piece.

Students will revise texts for organization, elaboration, fluency and clarity.

Students will research information from multiple sources for a specific purpose.

Students will evaluate the validity of primary and secondary sources of information to authenticate research.

Students will publish and/or present final products in a myriad of ways, including the use of the arts and technology.

*English Language Conventions - Students apply the conventions of Standard English in oral and written communication.*

**Students use Standard English for composing and revising written text.**

Students will demonstrate proficient use of proper mechanics, usage and spelling skills.

Students will use resources for proofreading and editing.

### Essential Questions

- How do we write, speak, and present effectively?
- How do we use the English language appropriately to speak and write?

### Focus Question

- How can one respond in writing to films in order to connect to the films and develop critical thinking skills?

### Core Topic

- Utilizing the Teacher

### Senior Project Objectives

Students will be able to:

- incorporate knowledge gained through the curriculum of the Understanding Film course
- form individual inquiry.
- evaluate and synthesize information.

- research print and non-print sources.
- connect new knowledge to the focus questions of the course.
- present information to an audience.

### **Assessments**

- First semester course: Instruction in writing the college essay
- Second semester course: Senior Independent Project

### **Pacing**

2 weeks plus time during prior units

**Texts such as the following:**

**Unit 1**

- *How to Read a Film*
- *How To Read A Film: The Art, Technology, Language, History , and Theory of Film and Media. Revised Edition*
- *Movies and Meaning: An Introduction to Film*
- Excerpt from *The Art of Watching*
- *Reading in the Dark*

**Unit 2**

- Printout of the definition for Paradigm

**Unit 3**

- Printout from The Dartmouth Writing Program

**Unit 4**

- *A History of Narrative Film\_ Chapter 3*
- "The Birth of A Nation"
- PBS Documentary "The Making of The Birth of A Nation"
- *A History of Narrative Film* chapter 6
- "Modern Times"
- "City Light"
- "The Vagabond"
- " Chaplin"

**Unit 5**

- *A History of Narrative Film*
- The Motion Production Code of 1934
- PBS Documentary on Censorship: "The Culture Wars"

**Unit 6**

- *A History of Narrative Film*
- "Citizen Kane"
- PBS Documentary "The Battle Over Citizen Kane"
- "RKO 281 The Battle over Citizen Kane"
- "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington"
- "Rebel Without a Cause" 1955
- "On the Waterfront" 1957
- "Easy Rider" 1969
- "American Graffiti" 1976
- "JKF" 1991
- "Forrest Grump" 1995
- "Pieces of April" 2003

**Unit 7**

- *A History of Narrative Film*
- "Double Indemnity" film noir
- "Laura" film noir

**Unit 8**

- Current documentary
- "Fahrenheit 911"
- "Supersize Me"

- *Don't Eat This Book*

#### **Unit 9**

- *A History of Narrative Film*
- "A Bicycle Thief" 1948
- "Beijing Bicycle" China
- "Monsoon Wedding " Punjabi Culture, India
- "Whale Rider" Maori culture New Zealand
- "Kandahar" Afghanistan
- "Himalaya" Tibet

#### **Unit 10**

- *Cry the Beloved Country* second semester
- *All the King's Men* first semester

#### **Unit 11**

- Senior Project Description, Requirements, and Assessment Handout