

## **“The American Dream,” Movies and Their Cultural Agendas**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Webster’s calls the American dream “the U.S. ideal according to which equality of opportunity permits any American to aspire to high attainment and material success.” This unit attempts to explain to fifth grade English as a Second Language (ESL) learners some values and ideals traditionally esteemed in America. Themes such as meritocracy, culture, social order and ideology are explored by using two film classics and two popular “movies” of American cinema.

The unit is designed as implementation of the character education component of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) social studies curriculum for grade five as described in the *Project Clear Handbook* (1998 Curriculum Department Achievement Institute, HISD) and is intended to lend itself to various extension and unit integration possibilities. Elementary teachers can use this unit to target objective requirements in Reading, Language Arts, Social Studies and Viewing and Representing. The proposed field trips in the lesson plans below are suggested as further extensions in support of this unit’s content.

My title, “*The American Dream, Movies and Their Cultural Agendas*,” refers to the implicit influence filmmakers exert upon the viewer by framing stories within the ideologies and discourses of the dominant society. Students will be challenged to comment upon the filmmaker’s assumptions and discover that no medium is innocent of ideology -- a body of ideas on which a particular economic, political, or social system is based.

I believe the films I’ve selected for this unit are rich in references to the “American Dream” and worthy of consideration for classroom viewing on many levels. Students can learn that “movies” consist of cultural images perpetuated by filmmakers and can be encouraged to develop critical perspectives necessary for evaluation of other forms of persuasion. With practice, students develop competency in critical thought and become capable of extending the lessons in character education beyond the values of *justice, truth* and *loyalty* targeted by the unit to any of the “truths” we believe are “self-evident.”

Theoretical applications included in this narrative serve to provide structure and to explain my purpose. Ultimately, my cultural agenda supercedes the filmmaker’s by expanding Webster’s definition. I want students to incorporate into the concept of the “American dream” a desire for lifelong learning, school success and “first-class” citizenship as goals for their lives.

## UNIT OVERVIEW

### Discussion

“Resilience” is a term used across social disciplines and in a growing body of ethnographic research to explain how “at risk” students succeed in schools despite circumstances usually associated with failure. High degrees of resilience are attributed to an early formation of a strong sense of personal identity (Trueba and Zou 2000; McGinty 1999; Kerr 1989).

This unit is intended to encourage the development of a strong sense of personal identity among elementary students in an urban school serving a 98 percent Hispanic population. The unit will be delivered to bilingual students: about one half of these are first generation immigrants and nearly all are in their final year of bilingual instruction before transitioning into an all-English curriculum.

“Transition” suggests students will acquire English in the course of improving their literacy skills in Spanish. In this respect, students will identify with two languages. Plural identity models informed by sociology, anthropology, political science and contemporary psychological theory have supplanted the psychological theory of single identity (Erikson 1968). These suggest identity can change and adapt across varied social contexts (Kagan, Appiah and Noam 1998) and that the way students identify themselves may be one function of their schooling.

By helping students define what it means to be “American,” teachers play an instrumental role in mediating the school culture to diverse populations and grounding both the students' worldview and their personal identity. A *multicultural* approach to unit content encourages participation in a democratic republic and provides a forum for self-expression. Also called “critical pedagogy,” this approach involves dealing directly and explicitly with issues of injustice and oppression, the privileging of mainstream knowledge and perspectives as they come up in the curriculum and in the reported daily experiences of students (Trueba 1994, Nieto 1995, McCarthy 1993, Perry and Fraser 1993, Sleeter and Grant 1993, Apple 1993, and Giroux 1991).

The significant feature of this unit is its reliance upon film. Two acclaimed “American classic” films and two popular culture “movies” will be viewed as an integral part of the support offered to children in their acquisition of the skills, attitudes and organizational behaviors (cultural capital) necessary for academic success in American schools. Teachers of ESL will appreciate the visual and auditory elements inherent in film that make this medium a highly stimulating classroom innovation. Language acquisition is greatly enhanced since comprehension is not contingent upon decoding text. As students are exposed to a variety of English speaking models, they develop an individualized vocabulary, which is transferred to their written expression and becomes their uniquely American “voice.”

Cultural knowledge, or elements such as language, social ideology and values, religious beliefs, technical knowledge and aesthetic tastes, have differing prestige value (Bourdieu 1997). Cultural elements are often used as markers of identity. Effectively transmitting and building the cultural capital of students is one way schools can strengthen the resilience of their “at risk” population.

### **Modality and film sequence**

An integration of listening, speaking, reading and writing is the prevailing classroom modality reflected in the lesson plans accompanying this unit. The unit consists of four films with three lesson plans for each and allows for flexible implementation; two films are screened in the first semester and two in the second. For example, one five-day film rental will be screened over a period of three days to five days (lesson plans below suggest details and options). Journal writing and extended projects can be completed in the days following the screening. An evaluation form (Appendix A) is included for teacher’s comments, which are kindly requested.

Each film will involve students in opportunities to improve their proficiency in their communications with peers, teachers and their own families. Students are expected to articulate in classroom discussion and personalize in journals the meanings of abstract social studies concepts such as liberty, freedom, capitalism, democracy, civil rights, responsibility, truth, justice, loyalty and “American.” The journal will become a resource for students to use in an extended project called *The Family History*.

Critical questioning during the viewing is an essential part of the unit and may take some practice. The goal is to make the most of the conversation you have with your students and direct their attention at opportune times without distracting them. For example, during dramatic pauses or lulls in action begin constructing your questioning repertoire by asking, “What is he/she thinking?” or “What is he/she doing?” or “What’s going to happen next?” Examine student responses for their understanding of gestures and body language as well as for their comprehension of the situations. Inferences, relationships, conclusions, sequencing, generalizations, opinions and word meanings are all familiar objectives of your language and literacy awareness program but, in a larger sense, we also expect improved cognition will transfer to all aspects of academic endeavor and decision-making ability.

### ***Excalibur*, Boorman (1981)**

Participation in democratic republics requires students to learn the cultural value of becoming active listeners and critical viewers of media. The arrival of the Information Age has increased our concern to adequately prepare young people for the environmental media barrage we cannot insulate them from. Studying films as a form of commodity production represents a departure from entertainment aspects and provides a framework

for film selection. In this context, films are part of the symbolic and material production initiated by the “ideological apparatuses of the state” which also include signs, symbols, rituals and television representations and which are colonizing (hegemonic) by design (McLaren 2000). The film chosen to introduce this unit in character education is *Excalibur*, a British film directed by John Boorman and released in 1981.

My reasons for selecting this film are numerous. First, I want to expose students to the images of European history and traditions that have dominant influence in American culture. Approaching the study of America culture as a European derivative provides background knowledge and establishes a purpose for the study of United States History and the English language. The film is intended to generate interest in an extended study of British colonialism and early American history.

Second, the concept of war is introduced as simple in form (technology), noble in cause and base in instinct. Students should know the United States is a nation born of war and has an extensive legacy of involvement in national conflicts since the revolution including a civil war. In *Excalibur*, both selfishness and altruism motivate war. Depictions of violence are in the context of war and the viewer is witness to scenes of brutal and bloody hand-to-hand combat set against backdrops of pageantry and romanticism. Students will be challenged to look for similarities of how people justify and/or glorify violence in other contexts, particularly in print. Student will review newspapers and magazines and clip articles they think fit this illustration.

Third, individual integrity is a central theme of *Excalibur* and the instructionally targeted values of *justice*, *loyalty* and *truth* are treated directly, although idealistically. It should be noted that the social studies curriculum for American schools begins and ends with character education. Accordingly, the expectations we have of students for “good behavior” needs clarification. Teachers are responsible for making explicit the standards we set for ourselves, for each other and for our elected representatives. We presume to teach not a body of law, but a body of thought – social thought. With this film, an interactive modality of film viewing is introduced. Teachers should stop the film for discussion and “check-in” with students during the viewing so they can monitor their comprehension and direct children’s attention to particular behaviors and/or speeches (see Lesson Plans below). Student questions may require interrupting the movement and rewinding the film and allowing the class to “read it again.”

Fourth, *Excalibur* serves as an example of a story originating in oral tradition and enduring over generations of retelling until eventually transmuting to the written word. Reading the first chapter of *King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table* (1994) is a prerequisite of this unit and underscores this literary connection. In many cultures, myth and legend from storytelling tradition have inspired literature of fantasy genre. Students should learn that the filmmaker-storyteller succeeds in the tradition of storytellers throughout the ages by spelling out terms of group membership and defining group values. In this respect, the filmmaker-storyteller acts as a cultural transmitter, much like

the teacher who aims to make explicit any taken-for-granted assumptions or expose cultural biases. Only by mediating contradictions, hypocrisy, prejudice and stereotypes endemic in all *storytelling* can teachers assist students in interpreting and demystifying the filmmaker's cultural agenda (assumptions and manner of persuasion).

Finally, directing students to the aesthetic and artistic qualities of *Excalibur* as well as the other films in the series is well within scope of this unit and constitutes another level of critique. From the inspiring theme music and horse's gallop to the peach blossoms gently descending onto the ranks of Arthur's army, the filmmaker uses every available device to give form to romance, enchantment, treachery, myth and magic. When Merlin summons the dragon in order to grant Uther's wish to "have" another man's wife, masterful effects turn the crude intention into a remarkable spectacle of film "magic." Uther rides off a cliff and is held up by the dragon's breath as he morphs into the image of his rival. The rape scene that follows is easily censored. In contrast to this barbarism, Lancelot and Guinevere's "tasteful" nudity at the moment they are discovered is an aesthetic that can be shared. The similarity of this scene to the Biblical description of God's discovery of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is not accidental and this literary connection could be made here.

Brave knights, jousting, dragons, spells and damsels in distress combine to make this love story a memorable cautionary tale from which gender role stereotypes and appropriate behaviors can be discussed. Although the situations are "sensitive," teachers mustn't balk at the opportunity to dispel fairy tale assumptions and prepare responsible individuals for their role in a "free" and literate society where moral decision-making is an inescapable part of growing up and evaluating all forms of media is every individual's civil responsibility. The alternative is to continue to underestimate the elementary student's ability to think critically only to complain about student deficits in later schooling. Thinking is a skill demanding of student practice and an environment. Watching a movie together, like a family, affords children the security of expression, questions, or opinions and sets the stage for evaluating typical American myths, stories and parables and the space that magic occupies in our own thinking

### ***The Gold Rush, Chaplin (1925, 1947)***

This film is an American "classic" and an example of the kind of ideology Americans alternately sell and consume, challenge and defend. In *The Gold Rush*, a destitute "little fellow" seeks food and shelter during the Yukon Gold Rush and, as luck would have it, strikes it rich. This part of the unit is called, "the justice myth and the problem of poverty." Children discuss fairness and the ways things are unfair. Children discuss how poverty is inconsistent with justice in our society and propose solutions. Children learn about being thankful and about sharing.

The Alaskan and Klondike stampede of 1898 appealed to the seemingly trapped industrialized urbanites in search of opportunity and the adventure of the frontier.

Similarly, the California stampede one half century before left a grim legacy of unrealistic expectations, absent codes of conduct, broken dreams, despair and death. Of the 100,000 people who set out for the Klondike, only 15,000 to 20,000 prospected and possibly 4,000 found gold. This setting is the context for a black and white film written, produced, directed and performed by filmmaking legend, Charlie Chaplin.

Chaplin chose this silent story, originally produced in 1925, for release again in 1947. The new version included his voice narration and musical score and was re-released two years after WWII even though the technology for sound had been available well over a decade earlier (Gomery 1992). Purists who prefer the original should know that Chaplin's love for the silent films are a well-documented part of his legacy and his decision to add sound was carefully considered. We will be viewing the 1947 re-release of what Chaplin considered one of his best films to appreciate the extent of his artistic genius – the musical score he prepared for this version as well as the recording of his own, personally scripted voice narration.

It seems that for Chaplin, America is a land where dreams come true because equality of opportunity is possible, although not necessarily guaranteed. The satire we observe in *The Gold Rush* is an expression of Chaplin's highest film-art and the astute social commentary that eventually earned him political criticism. Born into poverty in 1889, Chaplin and his older half-brother danced in the streets of London for pennies before being placed into an orphan's home for destitute children. His mother, suffering mentally after her dismissal from the theatre and the death of Chaplin's father, used her former connections in the theatre to secure the brothers passage to America with a dancing troupe. Chaplin was eight years old. Incredibly, after 42 years of residence in the nation that made him rich and famous he was never able to acquire permanent citizenship and, during the McCarthy era, was subpoenaed to stand charges of being a communist. Knighted by the Queen of England in 1975, Chaplin remained deeply resentful of his American experience and vowed never to return to the U.S. He died in Switzerland one year later.

Relating biographies and personal experiences to children is an excellent way of explaining how dignity and integrity are more important than status without evangelizing. For the many Americans who identify with the condition of poverty, this American myth has special meaning. The stories help us to treasure our relative condition of wealth and offers solutions (including humor), as in the Thanksgiving dinner prepared from a shoe in *The Gold Rush*.

For students of language and culture acquisition, Chaplin's masterful pantomime in *The Gold Rush* alone merits classroom viewing. However, what make this version of the "rags to riches" tale unmistakably American is its content of the *American cultural dialogue* – those pivotal concerns Americans have been discussing since before the revolution (Spindler 1959; Spindler and Spindler [1974] 1983, 1990, 1998).

## **Transmitting an American culture**

References to an “American culture” are often met with objections that America is too diverse to be called a culture. Nevertheless, multicultural education is informed by structural anthropologists who argue that the nature of culture is such that its’ values are arranged in opposition to each other. With consideration to this model, Stanford professors George and Louise Spindler have introduced the term “American cultural dialogue” to describe those opposing pairs of values which have continuously occupied America’s popular and political sentiment and are, therefore, integral to understanding American culture. For multicultural educators, the explicit divulgence of culture is an undeniable responsibility to students whose socialization can not be taken for granted.

The contributions of George and Louise Spindler ([1974] 1983, 1990, 1997, 1998) significantly illuminate how a dichotomy of values can define a culture. Surveying anthropologists writing since de Toqueville reveals a consensus of values in pivotal areas of American culture. Observations by Mead, Kluckhohn, Gorer, Ruesch & Bateson, Hsu and Gillin among others converge into fairly coherent statements of cultural ideology. These statements are pivotal in the sense that they are centers of opposition as well as agreement. They constitute behavioral norms and expectations for behavior from others but are also subject to argument, criticism and debate. For example, arguments about the value of honesty acknowledge the virtue of honesty if it were practical or if there were not so many dishonest people around.

Sustaining this analysis of values are George and Louise Spindlers’ assumptions that the discrepancies between educational intent and educational outcome originate in culture and that conflict is culturally transmitted. At issue is how students are acculturated into an American society by institutions of learning which reflect, as George Spindler put it in 1959, “the confused transformation from traditional to emergent values.” Spindler explains these American tendencies with various examples including the tendency to place a traditional value upon thrift even though keeping up good appearances that depend upon mortgages and installment payments make thrift impossible “as we play the game according to the rules of the American Dream” ([1955] 1959, 1967). What we find in America’s stories on film is an ideal approach for multicultural educators to reveal and make explicit our American culture of contradictions, not to confuse but to guide in an attempt to reconcile the discrepancies between our intentions and the lived experiences of our students.

## **The American cultural dialogue**

Not surprisingly, the satirical themes that permeate *The Gold Rush* confirms the presence of the *American cultural dialogue* including *achievement* and *failure*, *freedom* and *constraint*, *cooperation* and *competition*, *sociability* and *individuality*, *materialism* and *altruism*, *Puritanism* and *free love*, *hard work* and *getting by*, *equality* and *difference*, and *independence* and *conformity*. In *The Gold Rush*, Chaplin pulls and tugs at all these

threads to weave an easily identifiable tale of American pathos -- his version of the American Dream and his perspective on the migration to the newly acquired Alaskan territory.

Becoming aware of the concerns mentioned above is a significant goal for the teacher implementing this unit since these points of conflict are what we are referring to as the *American culture*. For the remainder of this narrative, my suggestions on relevant situations will be highlighted with parenthesis enclosures to indicate how the “American cultural dialogue” manifests itself in these American stories. The challenge for your class is to look for similar situations and references to the *American cultural dialogue*, a conversation about traditional American choices and tendencies in a profoundly free society.

### **Stories in film**

Like the nation that emerged from a provincial Victorian age, and on the cusp of the Great Depression and Prohibition, so enters Chaplin’s “Lone Prospector” onto the frozen North -- nameless, hungry and desperate, yet surprisingly optimistic (*achievement and failure*). The “little fellow” chances upon opportunity unexpectedly within the walls of “that beacon light of pleasure, that retreat of lost dreams,” the saloon. There he finds something more precious than gold and on the floor a discarded photograph of the woman of his dreams -- “Georgia,” a dance hall girl (*Puritanism and free love*).

Innocent and gallant, the “dauntless cavalier” steps in to defend Georgia’s honor when “a lady’s man” attempts to follow her into the powder room. The sole gentleman in the group, he single-handedly dispatches “Jack “ (*sociability and individuality*). Naïvely taken with her flirtations, his serious romantic fascination is the subject of mockery. Georgia is blameless, however, since Jack is everything that “the little fellow” is not. Jack has a name and the gold Jack literally showers over Georgia tells us Jack has achieved. However, Jack’s wealth is questionable and, for all we know, he could be a thief and a murderer like Black Larson, who has the “soul of a scoundrel ” (*equality and difference*).

Justice is an ideal and observing the “little fellow” convert his shoe into a gourmet meal for himself and his rival prospector “Big Jim” (*cooperation and competition*) underscores to children our ambivalent perceptions of the rich and poor, challenging the notion of “justice for all.” Chaplin’s “little fellow” reminds students that creativity is often and regularly pressed into service by the constraints of money (*independence and conformity*) and that luck is no substitute for industry. The snow he “hustled and shoveled” was a means to an end, affording him the New Year’s dinner he prepared to impress his beloved (*hard work and getting by*). At film’s end, it’s “the little fellow’s” pureness of heart that finally wins her over, riches notwithstanding (*materialism and altruism*).



Nothing short of a happy ending can be expected from stories like *The Gold Rush*. In addition to showing us how to behave, they tell us what we can expect from our own “American dream” as long as we have integrity. While acknowledging cheating others or just getting lucky as possibilities for getting ahead, in the final analysis cooperation is the key to “a more perfect union,” as in the relationship between Big Jim and the “little fellow” where cooperation displaces rivalry and pays off equally for both. Unpredictable and dangerous, America is the magical place of opportunity and bittersweet outcomes.

Obviously, our society has obstacles to justice other than poverty. At the time *The Gold Rush* was released in 1927, segregated movie houses were standard social practice. The point we can make to students is how our films have often “pushed the envelope” of moral acceptability and brought into question our collective identity as Americans and the ideals we herald to the world. *The Gold Rush* does more than parody the privileged class in America or our tendencies to celebrate the rich. *The Gold Rush* story tells us individualism is not the complete truth. We need each other, great and small, in order to survive and to prosper.

The discussion you have with your students will help prepare them for their family history project. From our own experience, we can share the times we think we achieved and the times we think we failed. We can encourage children to interview their parents for the history they need to understand what pain or sacrifice their parents' generation endured. Photographs can be displayed alongside the text they write and presented inside a folder. The project will be displayed in class and shared with their peers. From our perspective, the student’s family histories are “American Dreams” in the making.

At this point, the children have begun to describe for themselves and each other exactly what it means to be an American and can more readily appreciate the other stories you will share with them in this unit. When educators are tasked with the transmission of an American culture, sharing America’s stories in film is doing justice to this responsibility. Sharing the concerns of America with students marks their entrance into the dialogue of democratic participation, and this is our cultural agenda.

### ***On the Waterfront, Kazan (1954)***

*On The Waterfront* is a film about power. Explicit, overt power is held by an elite group of corrupt union mobsters who control the waterfront loading docks and have ultimate power over the lives of the longshoremen. Unlike the brief glimpse at “Black Larson,” students will witness the contemptible ways people are manipulated, coerced and tricked by the gang. Released in 1954 this classic of American cinema opens with a murder and, in contrast to the previous selection, pathos finds no comic relief.

This part of the unit is called, “the truth myth and the problem of hate.” Children learn that truth involves both quests based on our assumptions and the stark realities we

must embrace as a result of disillusion. Students will practice being truthful in their interactions with peers, teachers and parents. Students will learn that hate in society is inconsistent with truth. They will examine current issues of newspapers for examples of cultural tension and propose solutions.

Malcolm Johnson, reporting for *The New York Sun*, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize when his expose called, “Crime on the Waterfront” was published in 24 articles following the 1948 murder of a New York dock hiring boss. Screenplay writer Budd Schulberg (*What Makes Sammy Run?*) spent several years researching the subject and interviewing people who had intimate knowledge about the events in New York, including workers, labor union leaders and local priests. The characters he developed for the screenplay are based on this informal ethnographic study. In 1951, director Elia Kazan proposed working together with Schulberg on the project. The resulting film won eight Oscars at the 1956 Academy Awards (including *Best Black and White Cinematography* and *Best Screenplay*) and has been placed in the National Film Registry of the Library of Congress. The film has frequently been criticized for its “reforming zeal,” which is another reason for its inclusion to this instructional unit.

### **Ambivalence, influence and responsibility**

Before we can talk to students about influence and persuasion in media, we must consider our own positions of power as classroom teachers and the decisions we arbitrate. Because teachers hold sanctioned positions of power, ambivalence is rejected as a classroom modality. Regarding teacher preparation, University of Texas anthropologist Henry Trueba maintains “the need for clarity of political beliefs, practices and commitments is as important as the actual pedagogical strategies used in instruction” (Trueba, 2000). The truth of this circumstance is relevant to understanding success and failure of students in schools and helps explain how teachers intervene into the lives of students to become “gatekeepers” to cultural knowledge (Spindler and Spindler, et al.).

As you view *On the Waterfront* with your students, discuss your position on the “good” that people can accomplish together when truth is a shared, democratic ideal and hate is eliminated from among them. Begin this discussion by directing students thought toward friendship and asking, “What is a friend?” and “What is the most important part of making or keeping a friend?” The lesson plans below will help focus this discussion with references to the film.

The revelation of truth transformed the predominantly Irish immigrant *On the Waterfront* community who maintained a strict code of silence. In part, the “D and D,” or “deaf and dumb” ethic was reflective of their homeland’s colonial response to British occupation (Ireland 1166-1922). However, many oppressed cultures and communities have observed codes of silence in places where intimidation and threat of repercussion undermine truth. Students viewing *On the Waterfront* can observe the transforming effects of truth and love. The moral dilemma faced by the main character is resolved

when he determines who has proven, with their courageous honesty and truthfulness, to be his real friends.

Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) follows the boss's instructions and "sets up" a fellow dock worker suspected of cooperating with the crime commission's investigation of corruption on the docks (*cooperation* and *competition*), but is shocked when Joey is thrown off the top of the building instead of being "talked to." Consequently, no one risks being the next "pigeon" (*independence* and *conformity*) when the Waterfront Crime Commission conducts the murder investigation that follows. So thoroughly has the mob intimidated the community and exploited the community's code of silence tradition that they now effectively control their lives. Unchecked by law or moral standard, the mobsters extort money from the workers with usurious loans, steal from the worker's pension fund and decide who will or will not work on the dock (*freedom* and *constraint*).

Acting as the mob's informer, Terry reports to them any labor attempt to organize and resist the mob's control. In return, he is given privileged status and an easy duty on the dock (*hard work* and *getting by*). Terry's connection to the mob is deep. At one time Terry was a professional boxer with a promising career until his older brother convinced him to "throw" a fight (feigning defeat, also called "taking a dive") in which he was heavily favored to win. By helping his brother "fix" the fight for profitable gang wagers, Terry earned his brother the gang's acceptance while effectively ending his boxing career in obvious corruption and disgrace (*equality* and *difference*).

Now a gang flunky (*achievement* and *failure*), the mob's influence over Terry becomes seriously threatened when he reunites with Joey's sister "Evie" (Eva Marie Saint) who, upon learning of the "accident," interrupts her teacher training at a nunnery and begins to personally investigate the circumstances surrounding her brother's death. Recognizing each other from the parochial school they both attended, the childhood acquaintance becomes a romantic interest. Against her father's warning and church doctrine (*Puritanism* and *free love*) she accepts Terry's invitation to a saloon. The garish atmosphere of the bar is plainly foreign to Evie but she succumbs to Terry's peer pressure to consume alcohol (*sociability* and *individuality*) and it affects her almost immediately. Emotionally distraught over Terry's insensitivity, she runs out of the bar area into the dance hall crying where Terry seduces her into a dance.

Her moment of sobriety comes when a gang messenger, casually summoning Terry to a meeting with the boss, interrupts their dance. Coincidentally, the Waterfront Crime Commission appears at the same time to inform him he is under investigation. The event grounds her suspicion of Terry's loyalties to the gang and his implication in her brother's death and she promptly rejects him. Dejected and abandoned, Terry's mobster meeting turns out to be nothing more than a side-of-the-street gangland warning to drop his romantic interest in favor of the gang's capital interests (*materialism* and *altruism*) and his own self-preservation.

Accompanying the mob boss and fellow henchmen is Terry's brother who averts the gang's violent anger but urges Terry to "wise up." Together the gang speeds away from the encounter leaving Terry shaken and alone on a dark city street to contemplate his dilemma. Experiencing his own moment of sobriety, Terry runs to Evies apartment and, in characteristically macho fashion, bangs on the door, breaks in, and seduces her. His advances are irresistible and, after a token struggle, they kiss.

Until this epiphany, Terry believed two kinds of people occupy the world, "pigeons" and "hawks" and you should "do it to him before he does it to you." The truth of love transforms Terry and at film's end he demonstrates championship qualities "fighting back" against the mob, testifying for the state and taking over the local union. In redeeming himself Terry Malloy brings redemption to the community, restored by his heroic courage, intestinal fortitude and bold honesty.

### **Critical thinking: decisions, freedom and equality**

Revolutionary American patriot Patrick Henry is credited with saying, "give me liberty or give me death." Since then, marginalized individuals and extremist groups have used distortions of what they think constitutes "true" American patriotism as a means of rationalizing hateful, terrorist attacks upon innocent, fellow citizens and have become willing martyrs for their causes. American institutional responses to this problem will determine the extent hate will flourish in American society.

Our challenges as educators are to state explicitly, and believe implicitly, that the genesis of national leadership occurs inside our humble classrooms. We should tell students that as we read newspapers together, the class participates in government by exercising our individual power to discern the truth and express opinions, and by dutifully staying informed. We should help students understand friendship in opposition to hostile behaviors, deception and lies. Finally, we should tell students that people who write for newspapers are exercising their constitutionally guaranteed freedom to shape our thoughts and actions, and that by calling attention to problems around us they sometimes risk getting hurt or killed. The best, most honest of these (like Malcolm Johnson mentioned above) are honored as heroes.

Actors are often judged by the honesty they bring to the characters they portray. While character comparisons are fun and interesting activities, the lesson plans below merely suggest some themes. Ultimately the discussion you have with your students is discretionary. For instance, you may want to spend more time contrasting romantic advances between "the little fellow" and Terry Malloy or, the differences between the dance hall girl Georgia and the church girl. In any event, most important to this unit is calling attention to the dramatic differences we observe in gender stereotyping (ask students if they think the scene would work if it were Georgia who busted down Terry's door to get to him). Neither should we shy away from discussing domestic violence, gangs, cigarette smoking, alcohol use, sexuality, or guns in society because this is all part

of the visible culture we mediate to students. Teachers, like actors, are judged according to their honest portrayal of their role before a discerning audience.

The taxi scene in *On the Waterfront*, considered a defining moment in American film, involves a tough and sensitive Marlon Brando confronting his brother about his disillusionment, his regrettable decisions and his lost dreams. As Brando has influenced a generation of actors, likewise the teacher is poised to influence a generation of democratic participants. Although much is left to appreciate about *On the Waterfront* than space can accommodate, your presentations and evaluation of the American cultural dialogue will provide your students with substantial background knowledge and may alter their self-perceptions in a lasting way.

### ***The Outsiders*, Roos and Frederickson (1983)**

*The Outsiders* concludes this unit of study about the American cultural dialogue but is not presumed to be the end of your discussion about values. Engaging students with this film selection and unit should heighten their awareness of the chief concerns of American culture, as well as caution them about believing anything with unquestioned loyalty. The way this point is dramatized in *The Outsiders* story is one reason why I call this part of the unit “the loyalty myth and the problem of isolation.” Ironically, when educators clarify their positions about anything, they also risk alienating the people they tried to include. Tolerance, then, is a virtue we should come to expect from each other.

*The Outsiders* is a story about growing up and experiencing loss and suffering, absent parents and consequently absent love and guidance, and cultural conflict. The institutions serving the children are also mostly absent in this story, so that what we view are school-age children coming of age, from differing economic classes, alienated from the community, and polarized by their prejudice and opposed value systems. Despite its sixties origin, the story remains relevant to students under similar stress.

The film opens with the character Ponyboy (C. Thomas Howell) writing in his journal. The next scene moves us into a brawl set to rock and roll music. Shortly thereafter we visit a drive-in theatre. Social life seems much like the pendulum swings our emotions take us on at adolescence, which is not surprising considering the author Susan Hinton, was only sixteen at the time she wrote this story as term project in her Oklahoma school. This information usually impresses students who should begin to appreciate the relevance of the author’s perspective in all of the books that they read.

Called a “faithful adaptation” by the book’s author, the film’s images and editing move viewers beyond the written page to stir within them a powerful sense of nostalgia with some memorable, violent moments. At the film’s end, we move swiftly from Johnny’s death to Ponyboy’s journal, or beginning. It’s the same scene that opened the film and is a good illustration of the recursive nature of writing. Students may learn that

keeping a journal is a valuable resource to a lifelong quest for understanding our own lives and a safe forum for expressing our emotions.

### **Literacy and empowerment**

Making the literary connection (as in the beginning of *Excalibur* week) is the best way to introduce *The Outsiders* film. This is easily done since the first line of the film matches verbatim the first line of the book, although the film's musical score and song does much to enhance the opening. The song is inspired by the Robert Frost poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay" recited by Ponyboy to Johnny at the church hideout. The critical discussion the boys have about poetry serves as a positive model for our students to focus upon and remember as they begin reading the novel, *The Outsiders*.

Despite the book's seventh grade reading level, the success I've experienced reading this book with my students confirms my recommendation; keeping in mind that we view the film first in support of the reading instruction. Reading to students, then reading with students is not unlike the "Balanced Approach to Reading" model familiar to HISD teachers. In this case, we read to, view with, then read with students. This rationale is important to teachers seeking funds for a class set of books. *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton is available from Puffin Books.

The book and film are dissimilar with respect to obscenities found in the movie but not in the book. These utterances, in addition to the violent behavior and the tobacco and alcohol use in the book, should be a significant part of your discussion. Your grade level may decide to view this film as a way to contextualize the D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program and extend the HISD drug education curriculum. In any event, students seem to understand and respond most positively to what we call "appropriate" and "not appropriate" language usage. This is particularly true with bilingual children who have an acute awareness of social settings for language. Educators should continue to encourage this awareness in all their students.

Observing Ponyboy pen the opening sentence into his journal inspires students to write in their own journals. The lesson plans below will provide students with opportunities to experiment with the "appropriate" words they've acquired in the course of this study, with the emotional expression this story is likely to inspire, and with their newly energized thinking skills. We could begin this critical viewing by asking students, "What was life like for a teenage girl growing up in Tulsa, Oklahoma in the 1950s?"

### **Culture, conflict and identity**

Conflict for *The Outsiders* takes the form of class division, pitting the "Socials" against the Greasers," and describes the tension resulting from urban population movement to suburban development in the years following World War II. The story's author uses the proverbial "railroad tracks" metaphor to distinguish the class-divided neighborhood and

the drive-in theatre to designate the shared space where groups interact and differences are more salient.

Post-WWII “sub-urbanization ” that accompanied the “baby boom” demographic changes were responsible for the development of cheap family entertainment such as the drive-in theatre. For many suburban communities across America, farm fields were paved over for the new drive-in theatre that became an out-of-doors, come-as-you-are social gathering place. Families could let their teens and children loose in the large enclosure in relative safety. However, in some communities zoning ordinances were necessary to protect against “wild teens” that disrupted the intended ambiance (Gomery 1992).

In this story “wild teens” are called Greasers and the drive-in becomes the symbolic setting for the conversation between Greaser Ponyboy and Social “Cherry “(Diane Lane) about the differences between their groups. The differences between the groups and the contradictions within the groups provide the context for the *American cultural dialogue* noted in *The Outsiders*. Ponyboy describes the Socials as privileged class teenagers who enjoy the double standard of being “a public disgrace one moment and an asset to society the next.” Greasers, meanwhile, are stigmatized as the hoodlums who are angry, who steal, and who fight. Despite their stereotypes, both groups demonstrate flawed identities with contradictory values and double standards. The story elaborates on this theme, eventually resting (as is prevalent in this unit) on the “flawed hero” archetype.

Ponyboy, at fourteen is the youngest of three brothers. He and his brothers identify themselves as Greasers but Ponyboy makes it clear that he does not participate in stereotypical Greaser behaviors, mostly because he fears the social consequences of being removed from his two older brothers. The years following their parents' deaths from a car accident have been a continual emotional and economic struggle. Ponyboy is also “gifted” and is successful in school, which is contraindicated for Greasers (Students who have viewed *Good Will Hunting* may be able to compare a similar scenario).

Ponyboy’s oldest brother, now his legal guardian, works late hours for overtime pay to support the family (*materialism* and *altruism*). Darry (Patrick Swayze) is a caring but stern authoritarian figure whose high expectations of Ponyboy’s success in school are often resented (*achievement* and *failure*). Between the oldest and youngest brothers is Sodapop (Rob Lowe). A high school dropout, Sodapop often arbitrates the differences between Darry and Ponyboy but is clearly closer to Ponyboy, confiding in him his secret dream to marry his pregnant girlfriend. Now working at a local gas station, Sodapop tells Ponyboy about his disillusionment with school and his plan to someday get a better job (*hard work* and *getting by*).

Ponyboy’s closest friends are Johnny (Ralph Macchio) and Dally (Matt Dillon). Johnny lives across the street from Ponyboy and, whereas Ponyboy’s parents were kind

and generous, Johnny's parents are neglectful, verbally and physically abusive, drunk and hostile. Outside the corner drugstore, Johnny and Ponyboy rendezvous with Dallas Winston, or Dally. Dally's character epitomizes the Greaser stereotype and the group's "survival of the fittest" mentality. Migrating to the neighborhood from New York, Dally is older than Johnny or Ponyboy, has a criminal record, is prone to violence and is a run-away. Of all the "gang," Dallas Winston is the most deprived (*equality* and *difference*) and a leader.

Johnny and Ponyboy's literal escape is going to the drive-in theatre together (*freedom* and *constraint*) but they have also learned that the drive-in is a good place to "hunt some action." As the three Greasers, Dally, Johnny and Ponyboy crawl under the drive-in fence they seem to sense no guilt. Although they have the twenty-five cent admission, they are staying true to their identities as Greasers (*independence* and *conformity*) and following Dally who "hated to do things the legal way" (Hinton 1967).

### **Symbolic meaning and ritual**

*Beach Party Bingo* plays on the big screen as the Johnny, Dally and Ponyboy take their seats on the chairs in front of the concession stand. True to Greaser form, Dally aims crude remarks and annoying behaviors toward Cherry (Diane Lane), one of the two Social girls seated in front of them. Johnny, risking Dally's wrath, gallantly intervenes on the two girls' behalf. The exchange has symbolic meaning since Johnny, representing innocence, is Dally's opposite. Johnny is the gang's "pet," maintaining innocence the rest of the gang longs for, and is left unharmed. As Dally walks away Cherry's repressed candor is voiced and she declares she hopes to never see Dally again for, if she did, she would surely "fall in love" (*Puritanism* and *free love*).

With Dally's exit from the scene, the two Social girls and the two Greaser boys begin the dialogue of differences and equalities that make up the central theme of this story. As they exchange information, Two-Bit (Emilio Estevez), a wisecracking Greaser, startles the boys from behind by impersonating the sounds of a jealous Social boy.

Johnny is visibly shaken by the scare. Johnny's paranoia is a result of being seriously beaten by a group of Socials. Except for the heavy rings worn by the most vicious of his assailants, he remembers little else. Now Johnny carries a knife and has vowed to use it if he ever got "jumped" again. Two-Bit quickly apologizes for his thoughtlessness and brings word of rising tension between the "downtown outfit" of Greasers and their own. It seems Dally was seen slashing the tires of Tim Shepard's car. For planned, large fights or, "rumbles," the two "outfits" unite (*cooperation* and *competition*) against a common foe. Tim Shepard leads the downtown Greasers while Darry, Ponyboy's oldest brother leads their own East-side gang. The drive-in scene ends as the girls accept the offer to walk with Two-Bit, Johnny and Ponyboy to Two-bit's car so he can give them a ride home.



Once outside the symbolic neutral zone, tension mounts when the girl's Social boyfriends, Bob and Randy, pull up with their drinking friends in a car alongside the group on foot. The girls had left their boyfriends behind when the boys started drinking but now have to reevaluate. After some customary name-calling and gesturing, the girls decide the best thing to do to avoid an escalation of violence to get in the car with their drunken boyfriends. In the hours after the encounter, Johnny and Ponyboy fall asleep in the empty lot in the neighborhood and dream.

When Ponyboy wakes up he knows he is in trouble and tries to sneak into his house. Older brother Darry is waiting and, in an explosive scene, slaps Ponyboy. Ponyboy runs from the house, wakes Johnny, and the two run away together to their own neighborhood park. By this time, Bob and Randy have circled back to look for trouble and find Ponyboy and Johnny by themselves in the park. The tragic events that follow mark a turning point for all the characters in the story. Individually they undertake a quest for redemption only to learn that they are strongest when they are together.

After Johnny kills Bob, Johnny and Ponyboy's search for redemption takes the boys to a church hideout recommended to them by Dally. Sporting new short haircuts (*sociability* and *individuality*), the boys entertain each other with literary conversations about valor, bravery and change. They also smoke cigarettes, and while away with Dally, the church begins to burn down with trapped children inside. The three boys enter the burning church, save the children and become heroes.

Symbolism in stories often reflects the storyteller's frame of reference. Quests for redemption, reminiscent of the Holy Grail expeditions in *Excalibur*, are common elements of this unit of study. An inward transformation is often ritualized by some outward symbol, for example Johnny's and Ponyboy's' new, corporate-model haircuts. Understanding the frame of reference for these symbols helps students understand why Johnny had to die in order to be fully redeemed for the murder he committed, regardless of the circumstances. In addition, students can learn that the rituals we perform often internalize our guiding principles.

## **Conclusion**

The fact that many of my pre-adolescent students seem intrigued by *The Outsiders* story strengthens my belief that educators should take every opportunity to support children's educational experience with family outreach, caring and respect. As we teach students about our American duty to question authority, we should demonstrate our ability to justify our own classroom and school rules with rationale that moves them beyond the "obedience or consequences" paradigm. We can use as example our parents very legal and justifiable claim and responsibility for the direction our lives take as children.

By this time the children should have a good start on their family history project which supports this claim. The family history project helps us explain how a nation-state

also stakes claim over the citizens of that nation-state. The background information you provide your students can significantly assist them in constructing an understanding of their relationship to the *Constitution* and our subjection to the laws we use to govern ourselves. The metaphor is one we must resolutely embrace inasmuch as our expectations of student's loyalty depends upon recovering those national resources becoming isolated by our institutions of learning. "Drop out" rates at any level are an unacceptable part of schooling in America.

## **LESSON PLANS FOR *THE OUTSIDERS***

**Scope and sequence:** This is a four-day plan with a viewing time of approximately 20 minutes for each day.

**Materials needed:** Examples of symbols from varied sources, individual student journals and newspapers.

**Objectives:** To understand loyalty with reference to voluntary and involuntary groups, and as motivation for decisive behaviors. Students will use prewriting strategies to synthesize main ideas and details. They will examine the use of symbols in literature and explain how storytellers use symbols to evoke emotion. They will evaluate examples of symbols from print media for suggestive messages.

**Modality:** People identify with many different symbols. To a large degree schools function to inculcate students with those symbols typically associated with American institutions of learning. Invite students to arbitrate and negotiate meaning from symbols. As you critically analyze this story, examine symbolic meanings and the occurrence of isolation resulting with identifying, intentionally or unintentionally, with one group or another.

### **Day One: Drive-Ins**

#### ***Before viewing***

Read the first and second chapters of *The Outsiders* to the students. Allow cooperative groups of students to engage in a five-minute discussion of the following question: "Why did Ponyboy tell Cherry Valance about Johnny getting beat up by the Socials (Chapter 2). After five minutes, the groups present to their thoughts to the class. Lead students to infer that the dialogue serves the storyteller's purpose of contrasting the two groups.

### ***During the presentation***

BEGIN the film. Students will answer questions and note similarities between the book and the film. View and question until the two girls get out of the “blue Mustang “(car) then, PAUSE the film. Discuss why the boys in the car have become isolated from their dates. Ask, “Who can tell me what loyalty means. Are the girls being loyal to their boyfriends?” CONTINUE viewing until the drive-in scene ends. Note the blue Mustang as the cars exit the drive-in, then STOP the film.

### ***After viewing***

Students will write into their journals their feelings about the differences between the Socials and the Greasers. Ask, “Do you think the Socials and the Greasers are more the same, or are they more different?” Direct cooperative groups in using a Venn diagram as a graphic organizer (review the model with students and relate the Olympic logo). This prewriting strategy should simplify the task of developing two paragraphs. Additional structure could be provided with the following main ideas to head each paragraph “This is how Greasers and Socials are the same,” and “This is how Greasers and Socials are different.” Homework or extension: Students can interview their parents and ask them to describe their experiences with drive-ins. They can share what they learned with the class and compare the film’s images and their parents’ experiences (*Puritanism and free love*).

## **Day Two: The Cars, the Stars and the Fountain**

### ***Before viewing***

Read the third chapter of *The Outsiders* to the students. Allow cooperative groups of students to engage in a five-minute discussion of the following question: “Why does Johnny tell Ponyboy that he wants to kill himself? Does he mean what he is saying? How do you know? After five minutes, the groups present to their thoughts to the class. Lead students to infer that the dialogue serves the storyteller’s purpose of heightening the tension in anticipation of what is coming (foreshadowing).

### ***During the presentation***

BEGIN the film sequence from the blue mustang exiting the drive-in. When the girls get back in the car say, “Would you get back in that car?” View until Johnny’s death wish (“I can’t take it anymore”) then, PAUSE the film. Ask, “What is the problem in this story?” Direct students’ attention to the story’s preoccupation with assigning blame or allaying guilt and shame. Ask, “Can Johnny and Ponyboy become Socials? Whose ‘fault’ is it that they are Greasers? Why do the groups hate each other?” Discuss and mediate the students’ understanding of class distinction and symbol value (blue mustang, madras shirts, etc.). Also, discuss the literary function of symbolism as a way to activate

previous experience and evoke emotional response. CONTINUE viewing until Johnny and Ponyboy find Dally at Buck Merrill's party. When Dally comes to the door, STOP the film. Discuss the possible meanings of the symbols mentioned above.

### ***After viewing***

Students tend to empathize with Johnny. Lead a discussion to help them understand why we "feel sorry" for Johnny. Ask, "Do you think Dally will help Johnny?" Then, direct the students' attention to Ponyboy. Ask, "Why did Ponyboy run away from the scene? Do you think he still wants to get away from his big brother, Darry? Is Ponyboy being loyal to Johnny or is he scared to be alone? Do you think he might be afraid of leaving Johnny alone? Is that loyalty (*independence and conformity*)?" Ask students to define and describe loyalty in their journals.

### **Day Three: Train, Church, Owl, Cigarettes, Dawn and Sunset Poetry**

### ***Before viewing***

Distribute your collection of symbols to cooperative groups. Invite student interpretations of their meanings and let the groups make their presentations to the class.

### ***During the presentation***

BEGIN the film sequence from the point where Dally comes to the door. View, question and note the soundtrack for the train whistle, Darry whistling in Ponyboy's Dream and Dally's exclamations at the sight of the burning church, and again as he pulls Ponyboy from the fire. After Ponyboy is reunited with his brothers in the hospital, Darry takes him home and carries him inside the house. Wait until this scene fades to black then, STOP the film.

### ***After viewing***

Discuss the possible meanings of the symbols mentioned above. Review key concepts, dialogue and interactions between the characters. Ask, "How do you think Ponyboy felt when he read Sodapop's letter? How do you think Darry felt while Ponyboy was gone? What did Dally mean when he said that Cherry was a 'spy'? Why did Johnny decide to turn himself in to the police and what did Dally think about Johnny's decision? Was Johnny being a loyal friend? Was Cherry being loyal to her friends?" Finally ask, "Do you think the boys are heroes?" Ask students to work cooperatively to generate a list of the characters in the story. Each student should then write into their journals a description of the character they like the best. They should be able to give several reasons why they like them. Homework or extension: Students can invent and describe a hero. Analyze the qualities your students assigned their invented hero. Mediate your observations of their stereotypes (males, muscles, fighting, etc) and discuss the prevalence of these symbols (*equality and difference*). Remind students of the qualities

we are studying namely, justice, truth and loyalty and see if they can develop their hero's character with a story that demonstrates these qualities.

#### **Day Four: The Hospital, the Rumble, Letters, *Gone with the Wind*, Gold**

##### ***Before viewing***

Arrange a visit from the school nurse to speak about safety, our primary concern. The nurse should be able to contextualize the violence children see in movies to real life trauma. Topics on the agenda for this meeting should include trauma (particularly handgun), abduction and rape, seat belts and sober drivers, and pedestrian protocol (safety in numbers, car watch, alert).

##### ***During the presentation***

Begin the presentation and view “non-stop.” Discuss the possible meanings of the symbols mentioned above.

##### ***After viewing***

Elaborate on Ponyboy's speech to Bob and discuss equality under the law and remind them of our potential for “good.” decisions. Tell children they are members of a very large, complex and powerful organization that wants them to become good leaders and to “stay gold.” Tell children that good decision-making is the “key” to both. . Say, “There is ‘a lot of good in the world.’ Together, we must look for ‘good’ in ourselves and in each other.”

#### **THE WEEKS AHEAD**

Remind students of their member responsibilities and privileges, and of their duty to look for ways of improving the organization. Tell students that gangs are disloyal to our organization and unhealthy (“It an unhealthy relationship,” *On the Waterfront*). Remind parents and students about the importance of immunizations and, as soon as possible, begin announcing your speakers for career day and the topics they will discuss.

The students should be choosing the photographs to display in their family history project. As the photos are slowly brought into the classroom, allow the students to “show-and-tell.” They should attempt to describe, in detail, their siblings, parents and grandparents (You may choose to keep a Polaroid camera in your classroom for checkout in the event family photos are unavailable).

## **Family History Project**

Tell students to use what they have learned about symbols to design a family crest (like those seen on the shields in *Excalibur*). Students should explain the project to their parents and solicit their help with the design. The final design can be used to decorate the cover of the folder that will showcase the project on parent night.

## **Bulletin boards**

The tree has been the traditionally accepted symbol and metaphor to explain judicial, executive and legislative branches of government. Label the trunk “Our American Democracy. Perhaps you would like to use leaves to symbolize notable individuals. Place the names of these individuals on their respective branches of government as you explain the concept of “checks and balances.”

American history and current events are filled with unsung heroes who have contributed to humanitarian or environmental protection causes. Use this opportunity to recognize some of these individuals with medals of justice, truth, or loyalty

## **N.I.C.E. Field trip ideas**

Tell students you are planning “NICE” field trips for them. Explain the acronym. “NICE” stands for Needs Inventory for Community and Environment. Tell students that they are going to learn more about their loyal, fellow Americans who have given us many examples of “good in the world” to remember. Ask them to consider the following ventures (remember to take pictures for your scrapbook).

***Space Center Houston.*** Inventory your wealth because cost is a factor. However, this has been “voted Houston’s #1 attraction” and we should try to make this trip accessible to as many of our students as possible. Consider sponsoring an aluminum recycling fundraiser and let your students “hustle” for aluminum cans with this trip as motivation. A variety of educational videos are available from Public Broadcasting Service home videos, History Channel, or Discovery Channel to instructionally support your visit.

***Museum of Health and Medical Science.*** Don’t miss the opportunity of participating in this HISD sponsored visit (Check with your principal or magnet coordinator if you are not aware of field trip plans). Students benefit most from this visit when a high level of supervision can be provided so take plenty of chaperones. In anticipation of your visit, the museum provides pre-visit instructional materials to supplement your direct instruction of health and fitness (for service).

## FILMOGRAPHY IN ORDER OF VIEWING

*Excalibur* (1981) 140 minutes. \*TV edition 119 minutes.

**Director:** John Boorman.

**Production:** *Anthony Pratt.*

**Actors:** Nicol Williamson, Nigel Terry, Helen Mirren, Nicholas Clay, Cherie Lunghi, Corin, Redgrave, Paul Geoffrey, Patrick Stewart, Gabriel Byrne, Liam Neeson and Charley Boorman (director's son as young Mordred).

**Synopsis:** A stylish, sexually aware rendition of *King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table* written in popular adventure narrative with classical elements by Rospo Pallenberg and John Boorman. This film situates the model of a hero on a quest who wins brings prosperity to his homeland, makes a name for himself and wins the girl.

*The Gold Rush* (1925) 82 minutes, (1942) re-edited with music and narration, 72 minutes.

**Director:** Charlie Chaplin.

**Production:** Charlie Chaplin.

**Actors:** Charlie Chaplin, Georgia Hale, Mark Swain, Tom Murray,

**Synopsis:** Feature length film from United Artists (Chaplin co-owned the company along with Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks, Sr.) in which Chaplin's classic "little tramp" persona undertakes a lone expedition to the Yukon during the gold stampede of 1898.

*On the Waterfront* (1954) 108 minutes.

**Director:** Elia Kazan.

**Production:** Sam Spiegel.

**Actors:** Marlon Brando, Karl Malden, Lee J. Cobb, Rod Steiger, Pat Henning, Eva Marie Saint, Leif Erickson, Tony Gallento, John Hamilton, Nehemiah Persoff.

**Synopsis:** Budd Schulberg's unflinching account of New York City harbor unions (suggested by articles by Malcolm Johnson). After being turned down by every studio in Hollywood, independent producer and escapee from Hitler's Germany, Sam Spiegel raised 820,000 to shoot the film in New Jersey about corruption in the longshoremen's union. Tender and brutal, the story follows the life of an ex-boxer turned mob heavy. After a change of heart, he testifies against the gang for the state and exposes union corruption.

*The Outsiders* (1983) 91 minutes.

**Director:** Francis Ford Coppola.

**Producers:** Fred Roos and Gary Fredrickson.

**Actors:** C. Thomas Howell, Matt Dillon, Ralph Macchio, Patrick Swayze, Rob Lowe, Diane Lane, Emilio Estevez, Tom Cruise, Leif Garret, Tom Waits, Sofia Coppola (S.E. Hinton makes a cameo appearance as Dally's nurse).

**Synopsis:** Highly stylized treatment of S.E. Hinton's best selling book about troubled teenagers in sixties Oklahoma as seen through the eyes of a sixteen year old boy who likes poetry and *Gone with the Wind*. Evokes fifties melodramas and *Gone with the Wind*

cinematography. \*Stevie Wonder wrote the lyrics and sings to Carmine Coppola's musical score.

## **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

### **Teacher Reading**

Bell, D. A. *Civil Rights: Leading Cases*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown & Company, 1980.  
Reviews approximately 40 Supreme Court decisions from 1857 to 1979.

Benedict, H. *Virgin or Vamp: How the Press Covers Sex Crimes*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Investigates biased or erroneous news reports and films about sex crimes. A chapter is devoted to the story behind the film, *The Accused*.

Cazden, C. B. and C. E. Snow. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 1990.  
Reviews the history, policy and trends in bilingual education in the United States.

Curtis, A. K., J. S. Lang and R. Peterson. *The 100 Most Important Events in Christian History*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House Co., 1991.

Summarizes significant developments in the history of the church including the Puritan movement in America.

Hapner, P.P., ed. *The Counseling Psychologist, Current Directions in Chicana/Chicano Psychology Vol. 29, No. 1*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001.

Contributors explain current directions in counseling psychology including the implications of stereotypes upon identity.

Kupfer, J. H. *Visions of the Virtue in Popular Film*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999.  
Critically analyzes themes of virtue in several films.

Lyons, R. G., J. C. Rodriguez, J. Catalozzi, and N. Benson. *Struggles over the Purposes of Schooling in a Democratic State: Selected Readings in the History of American Education*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1998.

Position statements by historically influential educators regarding the purpose of schooling in America.

Mahaligam, R. and C. McCarthy. *Multicultural Curriculum: New Direction for Social Theory, Practice, and Policy*. New York: Rutledge, 2000.

Theoretical critiques of mainstream approaches, empirical analyses and policy imperatives for reform.



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Cultural implications regarding the function of symbols and ritual in educational institutions.
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Ethnographic case studies of five female students in an inner city high school.
- Prince, S. *Screening Violence*. New York, NY: Rutgers University Press, 2000.  
Reviews the historical context of violence in American films.
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A collection of papers, studies and essays traces the role of anthropology as applied to education.
- Trueba, E. H. and L.I. Bartolome. *Immigrant Voices: In Search of Educational Equity*. Land, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000.  
A collection of critical essays about immigration and education by various scholars of color.
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Literature review investigating the relationship between school and culture.
- Willett, C. *Theorizing Multiculturalism: A Guide to the Current Debate*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998.  
Contributors of essays explain prominent positions on multiculturalism including critical race theory.
- Zou, Y. and E. T. Trueba. *Ethnic Identity and Power: Cultural Contexts of Political Action in School and Society*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998.  
A collection of essays examines the relationship of identity to power (including phenomena such as xenophobia, prejudice and racism) with several references to the power inherent in media. Explanations of critical pedagogy and cultural therapy are offered.

### **Student reading**

- Brandt, K. *Cabeza de Alpaca*. San Francisco, CA: Troll Communications, 1993.  
Describes the life of the sixteenth century Spanish explorer who traveled from Florida to Mexico and sought justice and fair treatment for the Native Americans.

- Carpenter, E. *Young Thurgood Marshall*. San Francisco, CA: Troll Communications, 1996.  
Examines the life of the first African-American man to be appointed an associate justice of the highest court in the United States.
- Charbonneau, E. *In the Time of the Wolves*. New York, NY: Tor Books, 1994.  
Joshua is torn between loyalty to his French-Indian father and his desire to fit into the white man's world.
- Cooper, A. *A Punishment to Fit the Crime*. Chicago, IL: Franklin Watts, 1997.  
A look at the current state of crime and the criminal justice system.
- Davis, L. *Cesar Chavez: A Photo Illustrated Biography*. Mankato, MN: Bridgestone Books, 1998.  
Presents the life story of the Mexican American labor leader who achieved justice for migrant farm workers by creating a union to protect their rights.
- Davis, D. *The Secret of the Seal*. San Francisco, CA: Crown Publishers, 1989.  
Ten-year-old Kyo, an Eskimo boy, faces a difficult moral choice between friendship for a seal and loyalty to his family.
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Roger Lancelyn Green's adaptation of native British stories of the once and future king of Britain, King Arthur.
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Discusses the history of segregation in the United States, explaining how the Freedom Rides played a part in the civil rights movement.
- Hinton, S.E. *The Outsiders*. New York, NY: Penguin Book, 1995.  
The story of conflict between two groups of teen-agers called the "Socials" and the "Greasers."

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Presents a year of observation and participation in the juvenile justice system in Los Angeles, following the stories of a handful of youths facing a variety of charges and awaiting decisions that will affect the rest of their lives.
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In Cincinnati in 1927, paperboy Willie Brinkman tries to sell extras on the Dempsey-Tunny boxing match in his workingman's neighborhood.
- McGuire, L. *The Terrible Truth about Third Grade*. San Francisco, CA: TrollCommunications, 1992.  
Bored with school, Jane, a precocious reader, neglects her homework and alienates her classmates by making up incredible stories about herself until her teacher, Mrs. Sims, finds a creative solution.
- Malaspina, A. *Children's Rights*. Columbus, OH: Lucent Books, 1998.  
Discusses issues relating to children's rights such as equal access to education, health care, rights in schools and the juvenile justice system.
- Maupassant, G. *The String*. Tampa, FL: Creative Education, 1990.  
A simple peasant has his life destroyed by the lie of an enemy who accuses himself of theft.
- Morrow, M. *Sarah Winnemucca*. Milwaukee, WI: Raintree Publishers, 1990.  
Recounts the life story of the influential Paiute woman who fought for justice and a better life for her people.
- Neuschwander, C. *Amanda Bean's Amazing Dream. A Mathematical Story*. New York, NY: Scholastic Press, 1998.  
A little girl dreams about math.
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Examines various legal issues, including free speech, privacy, child labor and discrimination, as they apply to minors.
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Nina creates a problem for herself when she tells her friends that she will be a star in the upcoming ballet performance and they misunderstand her.
- Schnur, S. *The Koufax Dilemma*. New York, NY: Morrow Junior Books, 1997.  
Angry when he cannot pitch in the season's opening game because of Passover,

- Danny finally makes some important decisions about loyalty to his divorced parents, his team, his heritage and himself.
- Trelease, J. (ed). *Read All About It*. New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1993.  
A read-aloud book with various high interest articles and poems for teens and preteens reprinted from newspapers.
- Trip, V. *Felicity Saves the Day*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company Publications, 1992.  
During a visit to her grandfather's plantation in Virginia during the summer of 1775, Felicity's loyalty is torn between her father and Ben, her father's apprentice who needs help as he runs away to join George Washington's army of Patriots.
- Villarreal, J.A. *Pocho*. New York, NY: Anchor Books, 1989.  
During the depression era in California, Richard, a young Mexican-American, experiences a conflict between loyalty to the traditions of his family's past and attraction to the new ideas.
- Yolen, J. *King Long Shanks*. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1997.  
Although he hates their poor poetry, a frog king agrees to let two flattering scoundrels create an outfit for him that will show off his fine, long, strong legs and test the loyalty of his subjects.
- Zimelman, N. *How the Second Grade Got \$8,205.50 to Visit the Statue of Liberty*.  
Morton Grove, IL: Albert Witman & Company, 1992.  
A second grade class goes on a field trip.

## WEBSITE RESOURCES

### *Excalibur*

- <http://dandalf.com/dandalf/excalibur.html>  
[http://members.nbc/\\_XOOM/scifimovies/excalibur.html](http://members.nbc/_XOOM/scifimovies/excalibur.html)  
<http://members.ams.chello.nl/keuchenius/swas.html>  
<http://members.ams.chello.nl/keuchenius/prer.html>  
<http://members.ams.chello.nl/keuchenius/medi.html>  
<http://members.ams.chello.nl/keuchenius/exca.html>  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/8565/Literature/BritWorld/escalibur.html>

### *The Gold Rush*

- <http://www.qni.com/~nkchigh/film/lecture/goldrush.html>  
<http://www.newinternetbusiness.com/dvd/dvd-CharlieChaplin.htm>  
<http://www.mdle.com/ClassicFilm/FeaturedStar/star6a.html>  
<http://www.filsite.org/gold.html>  
<http://www.silentsaregolden.com/featurefolder/goldrushprodshot1.html>  
<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAchaplinC.htm>

<http://www.enl.unmassd.edu/InteractiveCourse/Ethompson/goldrush.html>  
<http://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/curkon/main.html>

***On the Waterfront***

<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/guides/on-the-waterfont.html>  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/8565/Film/waterfront.html>  
<http://www.musicman.com/wat/wat.html>  
<http://www.homevideos.com/revclas/26b.html>  
<http://www.aol.eonline.com/facts/Movies/0,60,12674,00.html>  
<http://www.moderntimes.com>  
<http://www.webcom.com/~duane/truth.html>  
<http://home.nycap.rr.com/history/Kazan/kazan.html>

***The Outsiders***

<http://www.sehinton.com/movies/out.html>  
<http://www.sehinton.com/bio/index.html>  
[http://www.geocities.com/outsidere\\_sehinton/](http://www.geocities.com/outsidere_sehinton/)  
<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/outsidere/>

**APPENDIX A: UNIT EVALUATION FORM**

**Title: “The American dream,” Movies and their Cultural Agendas**

**Evaluated by:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone or email address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Grade level:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Years teaching:** \_\_\_\_\_

**What part of the unit was *most* useful to you? Please explain.**

**What part of the unit was *least* useful to you? Please explain.**

**Additional comments or questions.**

**Mail evaluations to:**

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