Critical Film Review Assignment

The APUSH film review assignment is designed to supplement student knowledge of a particular historical period, person(s), event, or institution through the analysis of a related film. This is an opportunity to experience a richer encounter with history, as well as connect the rise of cinema as a prominent facet of American cultural history.

Historical films open up history to people. Films provide viewers a unique insight to events that we may never have the opportunity to experience. And although no movie can be entirely accurate, when done well, filmmakers can immerse audiences into a world lost in time, captivating our attention and connecting our understanding to history beyond the classroom.

For the film reviews, students are responsible for critically viewing the work, evaluating historical accuracy, and writing an overall evaluation following the guidelines provided. Students will be expected to complete FOUR total film reviews; students may choose only 1 film per section (Era).

Please note some of the films are rated “R.” You must have parental consent prior to viewing. “R” ratings are primarily for language and/or violence.

Eras of US History – Choose four total films to review (no more than one per era)

**Colonial Era - Foundations of America (1492 – 1820s)**
- Amistad (1997)—Trans Atlantic Slave Trade (R) (includes nudity & racial violence)
- The Crucible (1996) – Salem witch trials; Puritans (PG13)
- Last of the Mohicans (1992) – French & Indian War (R)
- Roots (1977) – Path of Diversity in America
- John Adams (2008)—HBO series of John Adams
- The Patriot (2000) – Revolutionary War (R)

**Jacksonian Democracy - Reconstruction (1824-1877)**
- Gettysburg (1993) – decisive battle of the Civil War (PG)
- Glory (1989) – Civil War; African-American regiment 54th Massachusetts (R)
- Lincoln (2012) – President Lincoln & the Civil War (R)
- Gone With the Wind (1939) – Antebellum and Civil War South (PG)

**Immigration & American Frontier (1800s)**
- Gangs of New York (2002) – Civil War era cities and immigrants (R)
- Far & Away (1992) – Immigration & Western Frontier Land Grab (PG13)
- Tombstone (1993) — Law & Order on the Western Frontier (R)
- True Grit (2010) – Law & Order on the Western Frontier (PG13)
- Wyatt Earp (1994)—Law & Order on the Western Frontier (PG13)
- Little Big Man (1970) –Sand Creek Massacre (PG)
- How the West Was Won (1962)—Westward expansion in the nineteenth century (NR)
Early Twentieth Century (1900 – 1950)
- Newsies (1992)—life in New York City and the 1989 newsboy strike (PG)
- Cinderella Man (2005)—1930s working class (PG13)
- Citizen Kane (1941)—Turn of the Century Newspaper Tycoon (PG)
- Raging Bull (1980)—Italian-American subculture (R)
- Seabiscuit (2003)—Horse Racing & the Depression Era (PG13)
- The Untouchables (1987)—Al Capone & the 1920s (R)
- Iron Jawed Angels (2004)—Women’s Suffrage Movement (13+)
- The Grapes of Wrath (1940)—the Depression and Dust Bowl (12+)
- To Kill a Mockingbird (1962) - Civil Rights & the Great Depression

World War II (1939 – 1945)
- Pearl Harbor (2001) –World War II (R)
- Saving Private Ryan (1998) – World War II (R)
- Tora, Tora, Tora (1970) – Pearl Harbor (PG)
- Fat Man and Little Boy (1989)—the Manhattan Project and the Atomic Bomb (PG-13)
- The Tuskegee Airmen (1995)—the African American 332nd Fighter Group of the Army Air Corps (PG-13)

Cold War Era and Vietnam (1945-1991)
- 42 (2013)—Jackie Robinson & Civil Rights (PG 13)
- The Help (2012) – Civil Rights Movement (PG 13)
- Malcolm X (1992)—the life of an important figure in the Civil Rights Movement (PG-13)
- Dr. Strangelove (1964) – Cold War arms race (PG)
- J. Edgar Hoover (2010)—FBI director Hoover & the Cold War (R)
- Good Night, and Good Luck (2005)—McCarthyism & the Red Scare (PG)
- October Sky (1999) –Post Sputnik; boy meets rocketry (PG)
- Good Morning, Vietnam (1987) – Vietnam War (R)
- All the President’s Men (1976)—Nixon and Watergate (R)
- Thirteen Days (2000) – Cuban Missile Crisis (PG13)
- Milk (2008)—the story of an important gay activist and the first openly gay elected official (R)
- Argo (2012)—the Iranian hostage crisis of 1980 (R)
- Miracle (2004)—1980 Olympic Games (PG)
APUSH Film Review Format

Student Name
Date Submitted
Class Period

Title of Film (Year Produced)
Genre
Director
Main Actors
Awards (nominations or wins)

The Truth – Actual Historical Event or Time Period:
Research the true history of the historical event, person(s), time period, or institution portrayed in the film. You may want to begin with a film review site for an overview of the film, but this site will NOT provide students with the historical background, or content needed, to complete the review assignment. For research, students should use print or online resources such as Hippocampus—excellent short videos!—at http://www.hippocampus.org.

The Film:
Plot: Write a synopsis, or summary (2-3 paragraphs), of the film. Make sure that your summary makes sense to a reader who does not know the movie. Do not refer to specific scenes and do not try to explain everything.

You must also include the next items, but not as different parts (they may be included in your description of the story)

- Place and time: Where does the action take place? When does the action take place? (present time, 19th century) Is the story chronological (according to the order of time) or flash back?
- Background: society, country, kind of people (age, culture social class), historical time, etc.

Comparison & Evaluation:
To what extent is the film historically accurate? Identify specific accuracies and director’s liberties with the film. How has the film furthered student knowledge of the history portrayed?

Provide an evaluation of the film. Give your opinion, but it must be more than “I liked it.” This is important as the reviewer can express the elements of the movie they enjoyed or disliked. However, as in all good journalism, the reviewer should also give impartial details, and allow the reader to make their own mind over an issue the reader liked or disliked. Opinions should be explained to allow the reader to determine whether they would agree with your opinion.
Other Reminders:

Important note of writing: the reader understands you are writing this review; therefore, do NOT use 1st or 2nd person personal pronouns (I, me, us, we, you). This is a formal writing assignment—be sure to check your work for GUMS (grammar, usage, mechanics, and spelling) errors.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism is never ok. Do NOT copy another writer’s work. All reviews are to be TYPED, single spaced, and are subject to submission to online plagiarism checkers. Students will receive a grade of 0% on work that is plagiarized, parent phone call, referral to administration.

All resources must be cited, MLA format, particularly your discussion of the actual historical events. If you are not sure how to use MLA format, refer to the following resources:

Purdue OWL: owl.english.purdue.edu/owl
Easy Bib (for your Works Cited page): www.easybib.com

You MUST use additional resources and not just your own memory!