

FILM STUDY WORKSHEET FOR A WORK OF HISTORICAL FICTION

A Cross-Curricular Activity Using a Movie Worksheet

[Click here to download TWM's Film Study Worksheet for Historical Fiction.](#) Adapt this movie worksheet for the needs and abilities of the class.



Why Students Need Instruction in Historical Fiction

Today's adults usually become acquainted with events from the past through movies that are works of historical fiction. However, feature films that deal with historical topics are in fact stories with protagonists, antagonists, conflicts, resolution, characters with various personality traits, and other literary elements and devices. Often, filmmakers introduce major factual errors in the interests of telling a better story. (An example of this is the movie [Selma](#).) TWM contends that an important part of both social studies and ELA instruction is to give students the analytical tools to recognize historical fiction in film and to analyze it as a work of fiction. These are skills that will benefit students throughout their lives.

In addition, many social studies teachers use feature films dealing with historical events to supplement curriculum and vary the classroom experience. Using an appropriate piece of historical fiction adds an element of deeply felt experience to social studies classes. An educational presentation of such a movie requires that students be made aware that they are viewing a literary work that employs the devices of fiction. Not only does this approach prepare students for a process that will be useful through their adult years, it has obvious cross-curricular benefits.

To assist teachers in presenting historical fiction as a literary phenomenon, TWM has developed a [Film Study Worksheet for Historical Fiction](#). This movie worksheet focuses on the film as a literary work and then directs students to compare the movie to the historical record. Finally, the worksheet requests students to evaluate the movie as a source of historical information. The worksheet is designed to be adapted by teachers based on the abilities of their students, time constraints, and the needs of the curriculum.

To minimize class time spent on teaching students about the literary nature of historical fiction, TWM suggests a [Historical Fiction in Film Cross-Curricular Homework Project](#). This is a semester-long project in which students are required to watch several movies of historical fiction at home. The movies must be chosen from a list prepared by the teacher. See TWM's film suggestions for [American History](#) and [World History](#). For each film, students are required to fill out a [movie worksheet](#) in which they must identify protagonist, antagonist, conflict, resolution, and various other literary elements and devices. As time permits, these can be reviewed in class. This approach teaches an invaluable lesson while saving class time for the standard social studies curriculum.

How to Use the Movie Worksheet in Class

SELECTING THE FILM: TWM recommends selecting movies for both artistic merit and relative historical accuracy. Teachers should be seen as role models who insist upon quality in the media they present. For some students, watching films in class or as homework will be their first exposure to movies of excellence. TWM provides suggested historical fiction film lists for [American History](#) and [World History](#).



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USING THE WORKSHEET IN CLASS: It is sometimes best to give the class an introduction to the actual events portrayed in the film through a lecture, reading assignments, class exercises, research project, or some other type of instruction. Information with which to evaluate the accuracy of the movie can also be provided after the film has been shown. (Most TWM *Learning Guides* for works of historical fiction contain an analysis of the accuracy of the film.) Students who are shown a movie in class can be assigned to research the historical accuracy of the movie as homework. Questions 7 - 10 of the movie worksheet provide questions relating to the movie's historical accuracy.

Review the worksheet and make any changes appropriate for the abilities of the class, the idiosyncrasies of the movie, and the goals for the unit. The worksheet can also be easily adapted for written works of historical fiction or for use in English Language Arts classes studying the genre of historical fiction. For works of historical fiction that follow the paradigm of the hero's journey, see TWM's [Hero's Journey Worksheet — Explaining the Monomyth](#); modify that Worksheet as appropriate and consider adding questions 7 - 10 from the Film Study Worksheet for Historical Fiction.

If necessary, remind students that the antagonist in a story is not limited to being a person. The antagonist can also be nature, an institution, a condition of society, a personality trait of the protagonist, or a problem in the relationship between the protagonist and another person. The antagonist is whoever or whatever the protagonist must overcome in the conflict described in the story. Student descriptions of each should include their role in the story and some of their important character traits.

TWM suggests that students review all of the questions in the movie worksheet before they watch the film. Several three to five minute breaks during the movie will allow students to review the questions again and make notes without missing any of the action. Provide a longer period of five to ten minutes after the movie has been completed for students to finalize their notes and then sufficient time to write full answers to the questions. Teachers may want to assign this last step as homework.

There are many different ways that the movie worksheet can be employed in class. For example, instead of having each student provide a written response to the worksheet, the questions can serve as the basis for a class discussion. Students can also be separated into groups of four or fewer, with each group being asked to give an oral presentation in response to a question on the worksheet. The worksheet can be simplified by eliminating some of the questions or by only requiring a single device of fiction to be discussed (question #4) and only one striking image to be described (question #6). In addition, when there are no reasonable ways for students to research the accuracy of the movie, delete question #7 or substitute another question for it. In these instances, the accuracy of the movie should be described in a lecture, a handout, or by some other means.

An example of a worksheet adapted for the film [Music Within](#) with suggested responses is available at the [Music Within Film Study Worksheet with Suggested Responses](#). This film, which TWM highly recommends, is about the life of Richard Pimentel who advocated for the rights of the disabled and was one of the people responsible for the passage in 1990 of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The acceptance of the disabled as full-fledged human beings and the removal of barriers to their participation in society was one of the five great advances in human rights in the United States that began during the 20th century (see the [Learning Guide to Music Within](#)). In the case of this movie, there is not a lot of research material available that students can access in order to verify the accuracy of the film. Therefore, question #7 from the Worksheet has been changed to ask a specific question about the movie. Information provided in the *Learning Guide* about the accuracy of the film will need to be given to students in the form of a lecture.

HISTORICAL FICTION IN FILM CROSS-CURRICULAR HOMEWORK PROJECT: Having students watch movies outside of class conserves instructional time. Because viewing works of historical fiction will usually be the main way that students experience history in their adult lives, TWM suggests that each semester, students in high school social studies or ELA courses be given a homework assignment to watch two — four filmed works of historical fiction. This can also be done in higher functioning middle school or junior high classes. Students should be required to analyze the film by responding to the questions presented in the movie worksheet. This can be done alone or in groups. See TWM's [Historical Fiction in Film Cross-Curricular Homework Project](#).

HISTORICAL FICTION IN THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: Published in 2010, the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects include historical fiction as a genre of literature covered by the Standards. p. 57. In addition, historical fiction is specifically mentioned in the Reading

Literature standards for CCR 9 for grades 6 & 7 on page 37 and in the writing standards under CCR 9, page 44. The fact that historical fiction is included in the definition of the term "fiction" means that all of the Standards that relate to fiction as a whole relate to historical fiction as well.

The Common Core standards support the analysis of historical fiction in social studies classes but only for grades 6 & 7. TWM believes that this is a major deficiency. Because historical fiction will be the primary way that most students will learn about historical events as adults, TWM recommends that historical fiction be part of the social studies curriculum through grade 12.

TWM has developed generic movie worksheets designed to cover most types of fictional presentations. These worksheets stress the literary elements and devices of the story and engage higher level thinking skills. There are worksheets for:

- [General Fiction](#);
- [Adaptations of Novels](#);
- [The Hero's Journey](#);
- [Historical Fiction](#) (this worksheet); and
- [Science Fiction](#).

These movie worksheets are designed to be modified for the abilities of the class, the curriculum goals of the teacher, the idiosyncrasies of the film, and specific literary, dramatic, or cinematic elements that the class has studied that may be evident from the movie.

Revised June 21, 2015. Written by [James Frieden](#), TWM, and inspired by a project contributed by Suzanne Paulazzo, Social Studies Teacher, Leland High School, San Jose, California.

For a film study worksheet for ELA classes, [click here](#).

For TWM's film study worksheet for Cinematic and Theatrical Elements and Their Effects [click here](#).

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