

Film assignments:

Select ANY TWO of the ten topics below; watch any ONE of the movies listed under that topic (i.e., a total of two movies, each on a different topic); complete the assignments for the movies.

All of these are good movies, which will contribute to your understanding of history. Some of them are historical documents in their own right. You are highly encouraged to watch more than are required.

All of these movies are fairly widely available (on DVD from the Brooklyn Public Library; Netflix; Amazon Prime; YouTube (links work as of June 2019); FFilms). Newer films on streaming sites are often in violation of copyright; apart from ethical issues, this means that they come and go, as they get removed and replaced--especially on YouTube, if the link given doesn't work, or the video has been removed, try searching for the title.

1. Reformation

Luther (2003). NOT the black and white one from the 1950's.

The life of Luther and the Protestant Reformation in Germany up to @1530.

This film is rated PG-13 for violence, and was sponsored by the Lutheran Church.

Assignment: Discuss the reactions to Luther's actions and ideas of the following persons: Luther's Augustinian superiors, Luther's colleagues at the University of Wittenberg, Cardinal Cajetan, Frederic the Wise, Charles V.

2. Absolutism and the Old Regime

Cyrano de Bergerac (1990) Again, not the older movie, and not a filmed stage play.

Loosely based on a real person, Cyrano is one of the best-known characters of French literature (the film is an adaptation of the play of Edmond Rostand) and a personification of the military aristocracy of 17th c. France. (So are the Three Musketeers, also loosely based on real people, but all the movies are pretty bad, though the books are terrific)

Assignment: What illumination does Cyrano's story shed on the importance and nature of manners and martial prowess in 17th c. France? Discuss also at least two details of daily life which struck you as interesting.

Moliere (2007)

Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVNK3EIQ7g8>

Available through Netflix and the BPL. Rated PG-13 (sex and violence).

Dramatization of the life of the French comic playwright.

Assignment: Moliere's work was in large part a reaction to the stylized classical drama of Corneille. What was this classical drama like? How is Moliere's work different? Attempt to explain the appeal of each to contemporary audiences. Does either appeal to you? Discuss also at least two details of daily life which struck you as interesting.

3. The Napoleonic Wars

Waterloo (1970)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kH2BZgbbKjI>

Rated G, but considerable violence. Epic treatment of the Hundred Days beginning with Napoleon's return from exile and culminating with his final defeat at Waterloo. (The movie itself

was an interesting project, a British production, involving American actors, and literally thousands of Soviet troops as extras.)

Assignment: Why were the French officer corps, veterans, and the nation at large so eager to accept Napoleon back from exile and take up arms again after their total defeat in 1814? The mass citizen armies of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France were far different from the more professional British and Prussian armies. Is this apparent? How or how not? Discuss also at least two aspects of 18th c. warfare that strike you as interesting.

Becky Sharp (1935)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibE856j-K9M>

Unrated. Probably the best adaptation of William Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*, a social satire. Also the first commercial film shot in Technicolor.

Assignment: Discuss at least three instances in which the story illuminates the class structure of Regency England.

4. Imperialism--winning empires

Zulu (1964). NOT "Zulu Dawn"

Unrated; considerable violence. The battle of Roarks Drift, in the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879, in which a detachment of 150 British troops defeated some 4,000 Zulus a few days after 1,400 (of 1,800) British troops were killed at the battle of Isandlwana.

The Man Who Would Be King (1975)

PG; considerable violence. Adaptation of a short story by Rudyard Kipling. Two British deserters establish themselves as rulers of a (fictional) tribe in a remote area of Afghanistan.

Assignment (for either): "Empire building" involved relatively tiny numbers of Europeans in comparison to the native populations they subjugated. How did they do it?

5. WWI.

Grand Illusion (1937). Unrated. French POWs in WWI.

Assignment: The two French officers and the German camp commandant are motivated in varying degrees by patriotism and class consciousness. Discuss how these factors motivate each of the three men, and affect their relations with each other.

Oh! What a Lovely War (1969). Rated G. Highly stylized vignettes organized around popular music of the war. Features a truly all-star cast, including John Gielgud, three Redgraves, and John Lennon.

Assignment: WWI had an immense psychological impact on Britain, which lingered. How is this reflected in the movie?

6. Modernity

Man with a Movie Camera (1929). Unrated.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWtNKlRBn98>

Berlin, Symphony of a Great City (1927) Unrated.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wY5GdeqOkfc>

These films are examples of the same genre, silent film depictions (accompanied by an orchestral score) of daily life.

Assignment (for either): Both films are concerned to show the modernity of the cities they portray. What do they emphasize to this end? Obviously, both show innumerable details of daily life. Select and discuss at least three of these which are surprising to you. (In other words, what did you learn about life in these places, what the people had or did not have, do or did not do, that you did not know, or did not think about, before). Your response should also take into consideration the city in question, specifically, Odessa twelve years after the Bolshevik revolution and Weimar Berlin. How does the portrayal of the city and its people compare to the stereotypical view of life in the Soviet Union or Weimar Germany?

7. Propaganda

Soviet

Battleship Potemkin (1925) Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mCR44ihk6C8>
Unrated; regarded as violent in its day. Fictionalized (the massacre of civilians never occurred) account of 1905 naval mutiny.

October: Ten Days that Shook the World (1927) Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YVuf3T3k-W0>

Unrated. Account of the Revolution of 1917, commissioned by the Soviet government for its tenth anniversary.

These films are unabashed Soviet propaganda, and reckoned effective. *Potemkin* was banned in the UK until 1954 (and X-rated until 1978), and in France and West Germany after WWII (though it was shown in Nazi Germany).

Assignment (for either): What is the message of the film,? How, and how effectively is it conveyed?

Nazi

Triumph of the Will. (1935) Unrated. Youtube
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GHS2coAzLJ8> Documents the 1934 Nuremberg Nazi Party Rally.

Assignment: Is it propaganda, designed to “sell” Nazi ideology, or is it merely a documentary of (theatrical) ceremonies and speeches (uninteresting, except to those already disposed to be interested)?

Allied

In Which We Serve (1942) Unrated.
Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZkdpLF12Jc>

Unabashed British propaganda, produced by the British Ministry of Information. An English naval ship and its crew, from construction to sinking. (Noel Coward wrote the screenplay and music, and acts in it.)

Assignment: What is the message of the film, how, and how effectively is it conveyed?

Mrs Miniver (1942) Unrated.

Academy Award for Best Picture. An upper-middle class English family at the beginning of WWII.

Assignment: Two major themes in the movie are the effects of the war upon the civilian population of Britain, and relationships between social classes. Which of the first figure in film? How is the British class system portrayed, and to what extent is it influenced by the war? What is the message of the film, how, and how effectively is it conveyed?

10. Imperialism--losing empires

Breaker Morant (1980).

Rated PG; violence and implied sex.

Court-martial of British soldiers for atrocities during the Boer War. Based on a true story.

The Battle of Algiers (1966).

Youtube https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_N2wyq7fCE

Unrated; considerable violence.

French attempts to suppress Algerian independence movement 1954-7. (The events are largely real, the characters composites).

Both movies are intended to be even-handed, and both were politically fraught. The book on which *Breaker Morant* was based was banned in Australia during both World Wars, and *The Battle of Algiers* was banned in France for many years.

Assignment (for either): To what extent are violations of the "rules of war" a matter of obeying or disobeying orders? Is the violation of "rules of war" inescapable in conflicts involving irregular forces? How much (if any) sympathy do you have for the French and British soldiers and for the Algerian and Boer guerrillas? Why?