**Movie Critique Sheet**

**Paragraph One – Information**

Write a short paragraph including the name of the movie, the director, producer, the three top stars, and the year of release. Also include when and where you watched the film and any special comments on its release (was it abridged or colorized version?, is it in more than one part?, was it part of a series?, was it based on a novel?, etc.)

# Paragraph Two – The Plot

In no more than one good paragraph, retell the plot. Of course, you will not be able to give all the details. Just condense the main story line into five to eight sentences.

# Paragraph Three – The Reality

Were there any characters in the movie based on real people? If so, who were they and were they treated with historical accuracy? Were there any real events (battles, migrations, laws, etc.)? If so, were they correct as to event, time period, etc.? If there were *no* real characters or events in a historical movie, it was probably a conscious decision on the part of the writers and director. Try to analyze why reality was omitted. (HINT: It is very probably you will need to do serious research for this paragraph, both to find out if people or things were real and if they were presented accurately.)

# Paragraph Four – The Setting

When and where was the movie set? If several locations were used, were they all depicted realistically? Were there forests, mountains, rivers, where they should have been for the real setting? How long a lime span did it cover? Were the houses, furnishings, foods, tools, weapons, clothes, hairstyles, shoes, streets, shown with accuracy? Give some examples of period props you think were especially well or poorly presented. Again, you will need to research.

# Paragraph Five – Evaluation

Give an evaluation of the film. Don’t just say, “I liked it because it was a good movie,” or “I hated it because it was boring.” Like a real film critic, point out the strengths and weaknesses of the movies. Which actors performed well and which were inadequate? Were there places where the plot was vague, too slow, or too fast? Were there stereotyped roles or rounded characterizations? Did the story build to a logical climax and resolve itself satisfactorily? Did it hold the viewer’s interest uniformly? Why? If the film was done many years ago, would it be done differently today? Why? Did the film make the viewer more aware of history or just confuse the issue? What would have made the film better? Would you recommend the film to another student? Why?

**3500 to 500 B.C.E.**

* *Clan of the Cave Bear* (1986). Written by John Sayles and based on Jean Auel's bestselling novel set in prehistoric times, stars Daryl Hannah as an intelligent Cro-Magnon woman adopted and raised by lesser-evolved Neanderthals.
* *Quest for Fire* (1982). Paleolithic hunter/gatherers have many adventures and clash with a more sophisticated culture while they search for the secret of creating fire. With Ron Perlman.
* *The Ten Commandments*(1956). Cecil B. De Mille, starring Charleton Heston.
* *Pharaoh* (1966). Little-known but critically acclaimed Polish film about Pharaoh Ramses III as he battled the high priest for economic and military control of Egypt.
* *The Prince of Egypt* (1998). Animated musical version of the story of Moses leading Hebrews out of Egypt. Worth watching for the artwork depicting Egyptian cities and costumes. Voices of Val Kilmer and Ralph Fiennes.
* *The Ten Commandments* (1956). Classic epic film about Moses leading Hebrews out of Egypt. First part contains some excellent views of Egyptian culture. With Charlton Heston.
* *The Emperor and the Assassin* (1999). Chinese film set in the period of the Warring States: battles, blood, intrigue, and romance. Directed by Kaige Chen.

**500 B.C.E. to 500 C.E.**

* *The 300 Spartans* (1962). Starring Richard Egan and Ralph Richardson,
* *Asoka* (2001). Half fact, half fiction account of the life of one of the greatest Indian
  + emperors. Directed by Satosh Sivan and with Shah Rukh Khan and Kareena Kapoor.
* *Troy,* (2004) Brad Pitt.
* *Cleopatra* (1963). Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton.
* *Fall of the Roman Empire* (1964). Sophia Loren, Stephen Boyd.
* *Gladiator* (2000). Russell Crowe.
* *I Claudius* (1975). Derek Jacobi.
* *Spartacus* (1960). Kirk Douglas.
* *The Silk Road* (1992). The legendary story of a young scholar’s coming of age on the war-torn fringes of a great empire. Dragooned by a Chinese mercenary general, Xingte saves the life of a beautiful princess, and their love and fate is sealed in the woven textures of eleventh-century China. Directed by Junya Sato.
* *Attila* (2000). Very “Hollywood-ized” action movie depiction of the great warrior-king of the Huns and his conflicts with the Roman Empire. Some of the costumes and the sets are worth looking at. With Powers Boothe.

# *Constantine and the Cross* (1960). Starring Cornel Wilde. About the Emperor Constantine’s conversion and the battle of the Milvian Bridge.

**500-1000 C.E.**

* *The Message (Story of Islam)* (1976). The story of Muhammad and the early spread of the religion of Islam. With Anthony Quinn and Irene Papas.
* *The Silk Road* (1992). The legendary story of a young scholar's coming of age on the war-torn fringes of a great empire. Dragooned by a Chinese mercenary general, Xingte saves the life of a beautiful princess, and their love and fate is sealed in the woven textures of eleventh century China. Directed by Junya Sato.

**1000 to 1500 C.E.**

* *Marco Polo* (1961). Italian explorer rescues khan’s daughter, meets hermit who has invented gunpowder, and builds cannon. With Rory Calhoun.
* *Marco the Magnificent* (1965). Story of Polo’s travels to China. With Orson Welles as a Venetian servant.
* *The Conqueror* (1956). The story of Chinggis Khan, a little-known John Wayne adventure movie.
* *The Mongols* (1960). Son of Chinggis Khan slashes and burns his way across Europe. With Jack Palance.
* *Becket* (1964). Henry II of England promotes best friend Thomas Becket to archbishop and a power struggle ensues. With Peter O’Toole and Richard Burton.
* *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975). Hilarious British film that pokes fun at all things medieval (and many modern).
* *Name of the Rose* (1986). A murder mystery set in a medieval monastery. From the best-seller by Umberto Eco. With Sean Connery.
* *Return of Martin Guerre* (1983). One of the more historically accurate films, visually and literarily, set in the late Middle Ages, the U.S. version stars Gerard Depardieu and Nathalie Baye. The story, based on Natalie Zemon Davis’ work, is about a husband who returns from the Hundred Years’ War to a small village in France. While it appears he may be an imposter, the wife finds him worth keeping anyway. The film illuminates many social issues. In French, with subtitles.
* *Robin Hood*. There are many versions of this film available: *Robin and Marian* (1976) stars Sean Connery and Audrey Hepburn, which makes it worth seeing, but it is set long after the crusades and focuses on the romance between the two eponymous characters, not the political and social developments of the day. *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves* (1991), which features Kevin Costner in the title role, is better for the historical aspects. Students will probably also like it more, since it has a more modern feel, but Costner’s rendition of Robin is painful, as is most of the acting. It is in any case a pale reproduction of the original *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) starring Errol Flynn and Olivia De Havilland, which is now available in color and hits directly on all of the themes in this chapter. Even after seventy years, it has enough action and romance, dramatized beautifully by an all-star cast, to hold the attention of an modern audience.
* *The Sorceress* (1988). Set in a rural French village. A Dominican friar comes to the area to root out heresy. Excellent depiction of peasant life.
* *Rapa Nui* (1994). Rapa Nui is the traditional name for Easter Island. This film attempts to explain some of the mysteries surrounding Easter Island: the huge stone images, the rapid population decline. Shot on location, the film is cited for gorgeous scenery, if a somewhat improbable plot. With Jason Scott Lee; in English.
* *Song of Hiawatha* (1997). Film portrays the life of the legendary Iroquois culture-hero from a Native American perspective.
* *Windwalker* (1980). In the late eighteenth century, an aging Cheyenne warrior (Windwalker, played by Trevor Howard, the only non-Indian in the cast), reflects back on his life. A powerful, beautifully rendered tale of family, duty, and honor in traditional Native American culture. In Cheyenne and Crow, with English subtitles.
* *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992). Generally considered the best of the Columbus bio-pics. Directed by Ridley Scott and starring Gerard Depardieu as Columbus and Sigourney Weaver as Queen Isabella. Visually stunning, historically reasonably accurate.
* *Artemisia* (1998). True story of talented Renaissance painter Artemisia Gentileschi, whose career and independence were restricted because she was a woman. In Italian with English subtitles.
* *The Agony and the Ecstasy* (1965). Rex Harrison as Pope Julius II and Charlton Heston as Michelangelo. The clash of two powerful wills at the height of the Renaissance.
* *The Seventh Seal* (1956). A masterpiece by Swedish filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Max von Sydow plays a fourteenth-century knight who returns to Sweden after the crusades to find his homeland ravaged by a plague. In a classical allegorical sequence, the knight plays chess with the Devil in order to prolong his life. In stark black-and-white with English subtitles.

**1500-1800**

* *1492: Conquest of Paradise* (1992). Generally considered the best of the Columbus bio-pics. Directed by Ridley Scott and starring Gerard Depardieu as Columbus and Sigourney Weaver as Queen Isabella. Visually stunning, historically reasonably accurate.
* *Last of the Mohicans* (1992). An American settler raised by the Mohican Indians, the hero Hawkeye is forced to serve as a guide for British troops on the New York frontier during the Seven Years’ War. Vivid battle scenes of eighteenth-century hand-to-hand combat. With Daniel Day-Lewis.
* *Squanto: A Warrior’s Tale* (1994). Shows the tragic consequences of European and Native American contact in New England: the hero is seized by English explorers, converted to Christianity, and returns to find his village destroyed by epidemic. Ends with the Pilgrim settlement.
* *A Man for All Seasons* (1966—not the 1988 remake). Story of the great Catholic humanist Sir Thomas More, who was killed by King Henry VIII for failing to submit to the reformed English Church. Won the Oscar for Best Picture for 1966; Paul Scofield won an Oscar for the title role.
* *Anne of the Thousand Days* (1969). Story of the woman who triggered the English Reformation, the ill-fated Anne Boleyn, mother of the future Queen Elizabeth. With Richard Burton and Genevieve Bujold.
* *Barry Lyndon* (1975). An opportunistic Irishman attempts to climb the social ladder in eighteenth-century Europe. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. With Ryan O’Neal.
* *Dangerous Liaisons* (1989). Sexual intrigue, decadence, and cruelty among the aristocracy of eighteenth-century France. With Glenn Close and John Malkovich.
* *Elizabeth* (1998). Cate Blanchett stars as the young queen who sacrifices personal happiness for the peace and stability of her kingdom. Events of many years are compressed here, but the spirit of the age is beautifully evoked.
* *Restoration* (1994). Robert Downey Jr. stars in this story of an ambitious young English physician in seventeenth-century England. Explores all levels of society from the royal court to the prisons.
* *Return of Martin Guerre* (1983). One of the more historically accurate films, visually and literarily, set in the late middle ages, the U.S. version stars Gerard Depardieu and Nathalie Baye. The story, based on Natalie Zemon Davis’ work, is about a husband who returns from the Hundred Years’ War to a small village in France. While it appears he may be an imposter, the wife finds him worth keeping anyway. The film illuminates many social issues. In French, with subtitles.
* *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1971). A parable of greed and obsession, this film follows of a band of Spanish conquistadors who set off from the mountains of Peru into the Amazonian jungle in search of a fabled city of gold. In German with English subtitles.
* *Black Robe* (1991). A thoughtful, sometimes devastating examination of the encounter of a Jesuit priest and the Huron Indians of New France in the 1600s. Gorgeously photographed, this film is noteworthy in that it neither romanticizes the Indians nor excoriates the missionary.
* *Cabeza de Vaca* (1992). In 1527, the Spanish conquistador Cabeza de Vaca led an expedition into Florida. This film traces that disastrous journey, his capture and enslavement by Indians in Texas, and the spiritual transformation that followed. Mexican production, in Spanish with English subtitles.
* *The Mission* (1986). Set in the Brazilian jungle in the seventeenth century, this film contrasts the sincere efforts of individual missionaries with the greed and corruption of both the Church and colonial administrators. With Jeremy Irons and Robert DeNiro.
* *Amistad* (1997). Based on the story of a slave ship, the *Amistad*, that was taken over by the slaves in 1838 and later seized by the United States’ government. Although these events fall beyond the scope of this chapter, the film gives a powerful description of the slave trade and the middle passage.
* *Quilombo* (1984). Acclaimed Brazilian film about a community of escaped slaves hiding in the Amazonian jungle in the sixteenth century. A realistic portrait of the brutality of slavery and the courage of resistance in colonial Brazil. In Portuguese with English subtitles.
* *Roots* (1977). The entire ten-hour miniseries is extraordinary, but the first episode is most relevant to this chapter. Alex Haley’s family saga begins with the kidnapping of Kunta Kinte from his village in west Africa in the 1700s and his experiences as a slave in the American colonies.
* *Sankofa* (1996). Through the mystery of time travel, a modern African-American model journeys from the ruins of a west African slave fortress to a French Louisiana sugar plantation in the eighteenth century. In spite of the fanciful pretext, a realistic account of plantation slavery in Louisiana and the Caribbean.
* *Peach Flower Fan* (1963). Based on a classic play from the Qing dynasty, this story of the romance between a famous prostitute and a writer is set against the collapse of the Ming dynasty. In Chinese with subtitles.
* *Shogun* (1977). This ten-hour epic set the standard for TV miniseries. Richard Chamberlain plays a shipwrecked English mariner in Tokugawa Japan at the time of the expulsion of foreigners.
* *The Seven Samurai* (1954). Set in seventeenth-century Japan, impoverished villagers appeal to the honor of a group of samurai warriors to defend them from bandits. Classic action sequences by the master filmmaker, Akira Kurosawa. English subtitles.
* *The 47 Ronin* (1979). This black-and-white film by Japanese master Kenji Mizoguchi is a thoughtful and subtle interpretation of the story, not an action-packed samuri flick. It is a classic in the Japanese sense, as it conveys the intricacies of the plot through detail and innuendo. The composition and cinematography are often breathtaking, for those who appreciate such things. English subtitles. [NOTE: The Robert DeNiro movie *Ronin* has nothing to do with this story.]

**1750-1914**

* *Gabbeh* (1997). A romantic fable set among a nomadic tribe in Iran. Gabbeh is both the name of a traditional handwoven carpet and the name of the heroine, who is forbidden by her father to marry the man she loves. In Farsi with subtitles.
* *Mughal-e-Azam,* or *The Great Mughal* (1960). The conflict between love and duty is presented in this largely fictional tale of the doomed romance between the son of the Emperor Akbar and a common dancer. An uncritical view of Akbar as empire builder. In Hindi/Urdu with subtitles.
* *Prince Ehtejab* (1974). Dying of tuberculosis, the Safavid Prince Ehtejab shuts himself up in his palace, where he is assailed by the memories and guilt of his family's cruel deeds. Based on the classic Iranian novel about the Quajar dynasty, which ruled Persia from 1795 to 1925. In Farsi with subtitles.
* *A Tale of Two Cities.* Charles Dickens’s tale about the French Revolution has been filmed many times. The 1935 black-and-white version is a classic. The more recent Masterpiece Theatre production is longer, but faithful to the book—avoid the 1980 film. Whichever you see, count on an epic tale of love, heroism, and sacrifice.
* *Jefferson in Paris* (1995). Nick Nolte plays Thomas Jefferson as the United States ambassador to Paris just before the French Revolution. Interesting character study: Jefferson enjoys high-minded discussions about rights and freedom, while still dominating his family and his slaves. With Thandie Newton as the slave girl Sally Hemmings and Gwyneth Paltrow as Jefferson’s daughter.
* *Revolution* (1985). Al Pacino is an unwilling foot soldier in the Continental Army; Donald Sutherland is a sadistic British general. Historically accurate, particularly the battle sequences.
* *The Crossing* (2000). By December of 1776, the revolution was unraveling. Washington badly needed a victory to regain the confidence of his men and the Continental Congress. On Christmas Eve, he led his troops across the Delaware River and surprised the British celebrating the holiday in their barracks. With Jeff Daniels.
* *The Patriot* (1999). Although British forces were notoriously brutal in the South, this film grossly overstates British atrocities toward civilians. That the hero owns a plantation but no slaves is also not credible. Watch this one for the battle scenes. With Mel Gibson.
* *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (1982). Anthony Andrews plays a British agent who acts the part of a simpering dandy while smuggling French aristocrats out of Paris to safety during the Revolution. Jane Seymour plays his French wife. There is also a splendid 1934, black-and-white version starring Leslie Howard.
* *War and Peace* (1956). Tolstoy’s sweeping romance set in Russia at the time of Napoleon’s invasion. Starring Audrey Hepburn, Mel Torme, and Henry Fonda. (Or watch the 1967 Russian version with subtitles.)
* *Germinal* (1994). A grim portrait of life in the mines of rural France, based on the novel by the French realist Emil Zola. Workers struggle against brutal conditions to maintain some semblance of normal life and eventually are persuaded to go on strike. Stars Gerard Depardieu. In French with subtitles.
* *Matewan* (1987). Gritty story about the labor struggles of West Virginia coal miners in the 1920s. A cut in pay prompts a call for a strike by the union with tragic results. Directed by John Sayles.
* *Molly Maguires* (1970). In the coal mines of Pennsylvania in the 1870s, Irish miners were resented by “native-born” Americans and brutally treated by their employers. They fought back with secret labor unions, such as the Molly Maguires. With Sean Connery and Richard Harris.
* *Oliver!* (1968) Lavish musical about an orphan’s journey through industrial, Victorian London. Not that many people sang and danced their way through such things, but it does a decent job of portraying the milieu. Another option, equally good and without the music, is David Lean’s 1948 production of *Oliver Twist* starring Alec Guiness.
* *A Thousand Pieces of Gold* (1991). A Chinese girl, sold into slavery by her father, is delivered to a mining town on the Oregon frontier. In spite her ignorance of American culture and the prejudice toward Chinese in the mining camps, she endures and eventually prospers. Based on the life story of a pioneer woman.
* *Dances with Wolves* (1990). Kevin Costner plays a Civil War veteran who is sent to a remote frontier post and learns to respect the neighboring Lakota Sioux. As he becomes more sympathetic to their struggles, the army questions his loyalty. Beautifully filmed.
* *Hester Street* (1975). A tale of assimilation and identity among Eastern European Jews on New York’s Lower East Side at the turn of the last century. A Russian Jew, Jake, has been living in the United States for five years and is joined by his wife and son from the old country. He is thoroughly Americanized, but she honors the old traditions.
* Reed, Insurgent Mexico (1971). American journalist John Reed is a sympathetic witness to the Mexican Revolution of 1911. Director Paul Leduc received an award in 1972 for the best film by a new director. In Spanish with subtitles.
* *Viva Zapata* (1952). Acclaimed film about the struggle and disappointments of the Mexican Revolution. Marlon Brando is the empassioned, illiterate Zapata; Anthony Quinn won an Oscar as his older brother, Eufemio. John Steinbeck wrote the screenplay.
* *Zorro* (1976), *The Mark of Zorro* (1940), and *The Mask of Zorro* (1998). These are but three of many films about Zorro, the Robin Hood of Mexico, but they are probably the best three. Alain Deleon, Tyrone Power and Antonio Banderas (in order from above) star in these romance thrillers set in early 19th century Mexico. The films touch on many of the relevant social issues. Avoid using *Zorro, The Gay Blade* and *The Erotic Adventures of Zorro*.
* *55 Days at Peking* (1963). Foreign troops and diplomats defend the besieged international compound in Peking (Beijing) during the 1900 Boxer rebellion. An uncritical view of western imperialism. Starring Charlton Heston, Ava Gardner, and David Niven.
* *Battleship Potemkin* (1925). Depicts the real-life mutiny aboard the battleship *Potemkin* during the Russian Revolution of 1905 as celebrated by the Communist regime twenty years later.A silent film by the Russian master Sergei Eisenstein.
* *Charge of the Light Brigade* (1968). A sharp antiwar film, set during the Crimean War, that shows both the flag-waving patriotism and the cynical balance-of-power diplomacy of the age.
* *Samuari Assassin* (1965). Considered by many to be one of the greatest samurai films, this one tells the story of a samurai whose family stands to lose everything if plans for the Meiji restoration proceed. In Japanese with subtitles.
* *The Fixer* (1968). Based on a novel by Bernard Malamud, this story of a Jew falsely accused of murder in tsarist Russia is based on an actual event that provided the pretext for official persecution of Jews. Starring Alan Bates. In English.
* *A Passage to India* (1985). An adaption of E.M. Forster’s novel of racism in imperial India, this film is subtle and yet imposing. Judy Davis plays a young Englishwoman traveling in India. Unimpressed by the (stereotypical) high-handedness with which her countrymen treat the Indians, she befriends a native doctor who takes her on a scenic picnic. The plot twists through an examination of the racism imperialism bred with impressive frankness.
* *Breaker Morant* (1980). In this gripping courtroom drama, three Australian soldiers serving in the British army during the Boer War are scapegoated for the murder of prisoners. The brutality of that conflict is revealed in flashback sequences.
* *Gandhi* (1982). Ben Kingsley stars in the title role, leading the fight for Indian independence and self-respect. Beautifully filmed and accessible at many levels, the movie won the Oscars for Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director. The historical aspects of the film are especially well done.
* *Lagaan: Once Upon a Time in India* (2001). It is 1893, and the residents of a small Indian village struggle under the burdens of drought and taxes (*lagaan*) imposed by the British. In desperation they agree to a wager: if they can beat the British team at cricket, they will pay no taxes for three years. The notion of poor farmers taking on the British empire has made this lavish Indian musical a huge international hit. In English and Hindi with subtitles.
* *Out of Africa* (1985) Another in the series of visually stunning films about British imperialism that came out of the 1980s. Based on the diaries of Karen Blixen, a Danish writer better known as Isak Dinensen, the story depicts colonial life in Kenya. It is a bit slow, but moving nonetheless, and follows the sweep of history quite well. Meryl Streep and Robert Redford star in this multiple-Academy-Award winner.
* *The Far Pavilions* (1984). A love story, a war story, an adventure story and a travelogue, this story of a young woman’s search for happiness is set against the stunning backdrop of nineteenth century India. A staple in university courses on India and colonialism, it features an all-star cast including Omar Sharif and John Gielgud.
* *The Man Who Would Be King* (1975). Sean Connery and Michael Caine are two British soldiers who set out to make themselves kings of Kafiristan in this rollicking satire of imperialism and imperialist culture. Based on the Rudyard Kipling story of the same name, this is a popular period piece (real backgrounds) that should go over well in the classroom.
* *The Picture Bride* (1995). In 1918 a young Japanese woman journeys to Hawaii to marry a laborer on a sugar plantation. On her arrival, she discovers that he is twenty years older than the photograph she was sent. A beautiful story about the hardships of migrant workers and their struggle to create community in a strange land.
* *Zulu* (1965). An epic action film about a small force of British troops trapped under siege by a huge force of Zulu warriors in 1879. The British have superior arms but the Zulu win their respect. Stars Stanley Baker and Michael Caine.

**1914 to the Present**

* *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1979). Based on the classic German antiwar novel by Eric Maria Remarque. Here we see the Great War, both in the trenches and on the home front, from the German perspective. There is also a newer edition of the film starring Richard Thomas that is equally serviceable.
* *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). The story of a Russian doctor, his family, and his lover, caught up in the Bolshevik Revolution and the difficult years that followed. Starring Omar Sharif, Julie Christie, and Alec Guinness.
* *Gallipoli* (1981). This riveting war drama traces the experiences of two young Australians, best friends played by Mark Lee and Mel Gibson, who enlist in the British Army in World War I. Their journey across half a world brings them to the trenches at Gallipoli.
* *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Peter O’Toole stars in David Lean’s desert epic about the eccentric British officer who led Arab resistance to the Ottomans during the First World War. The film captures the romance and the danger, the allure and the loneliness of the desert and the man. A sweeping drama with good battle scenes.
* *Nicholas and Alexandra* (1971). This three-hour production traces the reign of the last of the Romanovs up through the Revolution and the assassination of the royal family. Particular attention is paid to the domestic life of the tsar and his family, the illness of his son, and the influence of the corrupt monk, Rasputin.
* *October* (1927). Also published under the title *Ten Days That Shook the World*, this is Sergei Eisenstein’s masterful depiction of the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Commissioned to commemorate the tenth anniversary of that event, it is somewhat fanciful, a bit melodramatic and historically inaccurate in its portrayals. Still one of the greatest black-and-white films of all time though.
* *Paths to Glory* (1957). One of Stanley Kubrick’s lesser-known classics, the film is based on the novel by Humphrey Cobb. Kirk Douglas plays Colonel Dax, commander of a French regiment on the Western Front. He is forced to defend three of his men against charges of cowardice after an assault fails. This film was banned in France as slanderous for many years.
* *Reds* (1981). A radical American journalist becomes involved with the Communist revolution in Russia (1917) and hopes to bring its spirit and idealism to the United States. Starring Warren Beatty, Diane Keaton, Jack Nicholson.
* *The Blue Max* (1966). An often-overlooked yet very well done film concentrating on air combat during the First World War. What makes it worth watching is not just the great production values, but the fact that the story is told entirely from the German point of view. George Peppard and James Mason star.
* *The Razor’s Edge* (1984). Bill Murray—yes, THAT Bill Murray—is cast as Larry Darrell, a regular guy whose world is thrown into chaos by the events surrounding the First World War. While the movie did not receive critical acclaim, it is a decent and accessible rendition of Somerset Maugham’s novel of the same name.
* *1900* (1976). The film recounts the lives of two men, a peasant and a landowner, from 1900 to 1945. Events include the rise of fascism, communism, and the Second World War. Starring Robert DeNiro, Gerard Depardieu, Dominique Sanda.
* *Burnt By the Sun* (1995). A beautifully filmed story about a family on the edge—they think—of Stalin’s purges. The movie shows how deeply the Stalinist terror penetrated Soviet society in a thoughtful and provocative fashion.
* *Cabaret* (1972). Based on Christopher Isherwood’s *Berlin Stories*, this film details the anxieties—sexual, political, artistic and otherwise—of Germany in the Weimar era. It may take some explaining for today’s students, but the movie is absolutely brilliant from an artistic standpoint, and it conveys the sense of anxiety delineated in the chapter quite well.
* *Grapes of Wrath* (1940). Based on John Steinbeck’s novel, this is *the* classic film about the Great Depression in the United States. Henry Fonda stars as the head of the Joad family. Brilliant.
* *Stalin* (1992). In the title role, Robert Duvall convincingly portrays one of the most brutal dictators of the twentieth century. The film covers the early history of the Russian Revolution and is far more generous to Lenin than most historians today.
* *Tea With Mussolini* (1999). Cher and Judi Dench star in this story about British and Americans living in Florence during the reign of Mussolini. While the cinematography is wonderful and the movie superficially has a quaint and charming tone, the menacing specter of fascism lurks beneath the surface and eventually blots out the beauty of life in Italy.
* *The Triumph of the Will* (1934). German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl was hired by the Nazis to create a visual record of the party rally in Nuremberg in 1934. The result has long been considered a masterpiece of both documentary film and political propaganda. While chilling to watch, the film helps explain the appeal of fascism. In German with English subtitles. Another, less obvious film by Riefenstahl is *Olympia*.
* *Gandhi* (1982). A sympathetic biography of Mohandas Gandhi, Indian lawyer, activist, and spiritual leader, who led the Indian people in a nonviolent and ultimately successful revolt against the British. The film earned Oscars for Best Picture and Best Actor, with Ben Kingsley in the title role.
* *Frida* (2002). Selma Hayek stars in the life story of Frida Kahlo, a significant artist in her own right and also the wife of famed muralist Diego Rivera. More of a romance than a historical epic.
* *The Power of One* (1992). An overlooked film that shows how the pre- and post-World War II apartheid system worked from the point of view of a young English boy. There is some foul language and violence.
* *Passage to India* (1984). Tensions between Indians and the colonial British intensify when a white female tourist accuses a young Indian doctor of rape. Based on E. M. Forster's novel. Starring Judy Davis, Peggy Ashcroft, Alec Guinness.
* *Raise the Red Lantern* (1991). Set in China in the 1920s. An impoverished but educated young woman is forced to enter the household of a wealthy nobleman as his fourth wife. Reveals tensions between tradition and modernity and the dangerous politics in such a household. English subtitles.
* *Band of Brothers* (2001). A favorite of today’s students, this made-for-TV series follows an American airborne company from boot camp to the end of the war. It has won critical praise for its unflinching realism, though some might find this disturbing now and again; it was a cable show. Stephen Spielberg directs, Tom Hanks stars.
* *Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957). David Lean’s masterful production of the novel of the same name set a benchmark of sorts for war films. The film explores the conflict between British and Japanese codes of honor through the story of prisoners of war forced to build a vital railway bridge in the jungles of southeast Asia. Alec Guiness and William Holden star.
* *Das Boot* (“*The Boat*,” 1981). A powerful—often claustrophobic—German production about the crew of a U-boat in the Battle of the Atlantic. Widely acclaimed both for the gripping story and for the empathy with the subject. With English subtitles.
* *Diary of Anne Frank* (1959). Often overlooked because of the book, this is actually a splendid film. Had it not been released in the same year as *Ben-Hur*, it could well have won the Academy Award for Best Picture. Shelly Winters and Millie Perkins star.
* *Empire of the Sun* (1987). Jim was a sheltered child, living comfortably in the British quarters of Singapore at the outbreak of the war. In the confusion of the Japanese invasion, he was separated from his family and had to survive in a prison camp. Directly by Steven Spielberg. Starring Christian Bales.
* *Escape from Sobibor* (1987). A group of prisoners plots their escape from a Nazi death camp. They soon realize that their escape will mean death for other prisoners. Made for television, it nonetheless contains nudity and some graphic scenes. Alan Arkin and Rutger Hauer star.
* *Europa, Europa* (1991). An unusual film in many ways. It tells the story of a German-Jewish boy who ends up in the Hitler Youth. Based on a true story, it lends some interesting insights to the subjects of the war and war crimes. In German and Russian, with English subtitles. There are some scenes that might be considered offensive.
* *Flying Tigers, The* (1942). John Wayne made this film while the war was still on, which obviously lends itself to discussions on propaganda and the war. It’s pretty good just as a film too, and sheds light on a relatively unknown part of the Second World War.
* *Great Escape, The* (1963). Still a student favorite, the film tells the story of prisoners determined to escape from a German *Stalag* during the Second World War. While it glosses over many of the horrors of these camps, the chilling nature of the war is driven home in the end. Steve McQueen, James Garner, and an all-star cast keep the story and the drama moving at a good pace.
* *Jakob the Liar* (1999). Robin Williams stars in this simple story about a man who makes up news reports that he attributes to a hidden radio. Because the radio is supposedly in the Warsaw Ghetto, things become a bit more complex, however. The film attempts to show the human side of the Holocaust in what little positive light there is, but mixing comedy and mass death is risky.
* *Night and Fog* (1955). The film is a bit outdated in its style, but it remains one of the most powerful commentaries on the Holocaust ever made. It can be graphic and visually unsettling. In French with English subtitles; the subtitles can be hard to read, but they are not really necessary.
* *Pianist, The* (2003). Roman Polanski’s award-winning film about a Polish concert pianist, who also happens to be a Jew, who witnesses the Nazi takeover of Poland. He survives the Holocaust by hiding in the Warsaw Ghetto. Brilliant and different from any other Holocaust film.
* *Sands of Iwo Jima, The* (1950). A classic John Wayne film, barely out of propaganda mode, that tells the story of the capture of this key Pacific island from the Japanese. The film makes for great discussions about the war and the way it was portrayed. *Flying Leathernecks* (1951) is another Wayne film in this genre.
* *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). Arguably the finest combat picture ever made. The action begins with the Allied invasion of Normandy in 1944 and follows a group of American soldiers as they move inland. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Starring Tom Hanks, Matt Damon.
* *Schindler’s List* (1993). Oskar Schindler was an unheroic, German war profiteer who nevertheless risked his life and his fortune to rescue more than one thousand Jews from the concentration camps. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Starring Liam Neesen.
* *Sophie’s Choice* (1982). Meryl Streep won an Academy Award for her portrayal of a Polish refugee still haunted by her experiences and memories of a Nazi extermination camp. Based on William Styron’s novel, the story is historical fiction.
* *Tora, Tora, Tora* (1970). In this unusual American-Japanese coproduction, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is presented from both perspectives. The film builds from breakdown of diplomacy and military planning and climaxes with the battle itself.
* *World at War, The* (1974). Thirty hours of television that lay out the story of the war in gripping visual detail. Narrated by Laurence Olivier. Though it looks a bit dated at times, it remains the standard for television histories.
* *Dr. Strangelove, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964). Stanley Kubrick’s brilliant satire of the insane logic of the nuclear arms race. A parody of cold war militarism and containment politics, *Dr. Strangelove* (a direct translation of the German for “Dr. Pervert”) beautifully anticipates the protests of the late 1960s.
* *Failsafe* (1965). This movie imagines what might happen if an American nuclear bomber were accidentally sent to Moscow and could not be recalled. The film reflects cold war anxieties about nuclear war and technology in general. With Henry Fonda as President.
* *The Fireman’s Ball* (1967). Before the “Prague Spring” was crushed by the Soviets, the Czech film industry gained international recognition. This dark comedy is a thinly veiled parody of Stalinism and petty authority in a small town. Directed by Milos Forman. In Czech with English subtitles.
* *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). A veteran of the Korean War has been brainwashed by the Chinese as a political assassin; a fellow soldier suspects the truth. True to the paranoia of the cold war, people are not as they seem, and heroes cannot be trusted. With Frank Sinatra, Lawrence Harvey, and Angela Lansbury. Remade in 2004 with Denzel Washington and Meryl Streep.
* *The Spy Who Came in From the Cold* (1965). In this gritty, unglamorous tale of cold war espionage, Richard Burton plays Alex Leamas, a British agent posing as a defector. Based on a novel by spymaster John Le Carré with an exciting climax at the Berlin Wall.
* *Thirteen Days* (2001). Date: October, 1962. Place: Kennedy White House. The tense standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union over Soviet missiles installed in Cuba is shown here through the eyes of a presidential aide, played by Kevin Costner.
* *Battle of Algiers* (1966). Fictionalized account of the struggle for Algerian independence, shot in a black-and-white documentary style and featuring many veterans of that struggle as actors. As the war grinds on, there are few heroes and many atrocities on both sides. In French with English subtitles. The film was re-released in 2004, and is especially relevant to questions about terrorism—how to define it, how to stop it, and what its costs are.
* *Boesnam and Lena* (2000). Danny Glover and Angela Bassett star in this moving drama about a couple's struggle to survive and not let hatred destroy them as they live a life of constant turmoil and oppression under apartheid in South Africa. In English.
* *Cry Freedom* (1987). Against the upheavals in South Africa in the 1960s, a white journalist, Donald Woods (Kevin Kline), befriends a black activist, Stephen Biko (Denzel Washington).
* *Evita* (1996). Madonna and Antonio Banderas star in the musical version of the Perons’ story. Eva Peron is the focus in this lavish and often beautiful epic, and while Madonna can’t quite replicate the magnetism of the original, the movie does convey a solid sense of the Peronist appeal. Jonathan Pryce is miscast as Juan Peron, but don’t avoid this film because of the actors.
* *Kitchen Toto* (1987). A moving drama about coming of age amid the racial tensions in Kenya in the 1950s at the time of the Mau Mau uprising. A twelve year-old black child is placed with a white family as a “kitchen toto,” or houseboy, and befriends the eleven-year-old son of the white policeman.
* *The Year of Living Dangerously* (1983). In Indonesia in 1965, the democratically elected government of President Sukarno was overthrown by General Suharto, who accused him of being pro-communist. A young Australian journalist (Mel Gibson) is witness to these events; his guide to the harsh realities of Indonesia is a midget named Billy Kwan (Linda Hunt in an Oscar-winning role.) This excellent film was banned in Indonesia until 2000.
* *To Live* (1994). Traces the fortunes of one Chinese family through the upheaval of the Communist Revolution, the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Beautifully photographed and superbly acted, this film was banned for many years in China. English subtitles.
* *Bend it Like Beckham* (2003). One of the many “girl-power” films of the early 21st century, this story is about an ethnically Indian girl born in England. Her goal in life is to be like her idol, soccer star David Beckham. Her traditional Indian family has trouble with the notions of women in sports and female empowerment in general.
* *Double Happiness* (1995). The daughter of Chinese immigrants living in Canada struggles to fulfill the expectations of her traditional parents while at the same time pursuing her own dream of becoming an actress.
* *East Is East* (2000). About the hardships and rewards for the large family of a Pakistani father and a British mother living in Manchester, England, in 1971. Features both social conflicts and generational conflicts. Poignant and often funny.
* *El Norte* (1984). Heartbreaking story of a brother and sister who flee the upheaval of Guatemala for the land of opportunity to the north (el norte). Shows the hardships of illegal immigrants. In Spanish with subtitles.
* *Kandahar* (2001). An Afghan woman returns to her homeland many years after fleeing to the west. She must reach the city of Kandahar in time to prevent her sister from committing suicide. Powerful images of life under the Taliban, a life often absurd yet at times also surprisingly beautiful. In both English and Pashtun.
* *Lost in Translation* (2003). A washed-up American actor (Bill Murray) makes it big filming commercials in Japan. While not the main storyline, the impersonal world of the modern city and the strangely familiar aspects of all things foreign make for good commentary on globalization.
* *Mississippi Marsala* (1992). About the pain and dislocation of migrants in a new land. An Indian family is expelled from Uganda in 1972 by dictator Idi Amin (because “Africa is for Africans”) and resettles in Mississippi, where they must rebuild their lives. The plot features a romance between the daughter and a local black man (Denzel Washington).
* *Whale Rider* (2003). The story of a young Maori girl in New Zealand. Because she is female, she is disqualified from tribal leadership, but young Pai is convinced she is leadership material and sets out to prove it. A great film about family relationships and the tension between tradition and modernity.