



Accomodatio et Transformatio: Spartacus, Slavery, and the Red Scare

Guide for Curriculum Unit 17.01.02
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Primary source documents serve as the bedrock of all reliable social studies. They provide firsthand facts, descriptions, opinions, and accounts which illuminate the distant world of the past while allowing us to better understand the present. To many students, however, primary source documents are foreign, verbose, and tedious.

In order to reach out to these students, a history teacher's best weapon is often adaptation, especially through the medium of film. Passionate actors, perceptive directors, witty screenwriters, and elaborate costumes bring dusty historical documents back to life through an immersive audiovisual experience.

Yet with a bit of inspection, these cinematic adaptations of history can reveal much more than secondary historical details. By analyzing these films as primary source documents themselves, audiences can gain insight into the time period in which the movies were made.

This curriculum unit considers the story of Spartacus—the celebrated hero of ancient history and the 1960 film directed by Stanley Kubrick—as both a primary and secondary source of history. How does *Spartacus* compare to the ancient sources recorded before the common era? And how does *Spartacus* reveal the political and social turmoil which afflicted the United States throughout the 1950's and 1960's?

(Developed and recommended for History Through Film, grades 11-12)

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