



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1995 Volume II: Film and Literature

Introduction

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The seminar in which these units were written was originally designed to focus on film in its capacity to adapt literature to its own medium. It soon became evident, however, that the diverse interests of the participants would not be well-served by limiting the films under discussion to cinematic adaptations of literary works. Although the concerns of the participants include literature and the teaching of literature through film, they also encompass many of the other arts reflected in cinema— theater, dance, photography, and music—and include as well an interest in film as a medium that shapes history and social concerns in a uniquely cinematic way. Indeed, all of these teachers, ranging from kindergarten through high school, agreed that a thorough grounding in the “reading” or interpretation of film per se best suited both their individual needs and their needs as a group. The reader of this volume will discover that interpretive strategies and approaches to cinema are put to a multiplicity of uses for many different kinds of classrooms.

Kathleen Ayr uses science fiction films and literature in order to discuss social roles and language difficulties in her first and second grade classroom for students with special needs. Cleo Coppa is interested in the relation of the literary text of *The Wizard of Oz* to its movie version and, like Ms. Ayr, wants to interest her students in the process of making a film. Michelle Edmonds-Sepulveda, a teacher of dance, uses the genre of the “living picture” as a guiding idea for a series of dances originating in photographs that record significant moments in the history of Black dance. Issues of female identity represented in film—including stereotyping, the self-image of women, and the question of race—is the focus of discussion in Alan Frishman’s high school English class. Gretchen Gallagher uses two film versions of *The Jungle Book* as part of her whole-learning approach to the rain forest for grades one through three. The topic of Black emergence from 1840-1865 is enhanced by a discussion of *Glory* in Michael Guzzio’s high school classroom. Cheree Knight suggests a variety of ways in which dance compositions for students may be inspired by the work of artists as diverse as Maya Angelou, Shakespeare, and Alfred Hitchcock. Using puppetry, literature, and film, Geraldine Martin develops a multi-media unit—including the actual making of a film—designed to enhance reading and language skills for elementary schools. Carol Penney builds her acting class around three films by Elia Kazan starring Marlon Brando, the “method actor” par excellence, while Paul Turtola distinguishes among literary, theatrical, and cinematic approaches to drama in his unit. Sloan Williams, who teaches music to students in grades K-12, suggests ways in which basic musical concepts may be made accessible at a variety of levels through movie soundtracks. As the reader will see, all of these units point to the interrelatedness of the arts in the contemporary world and point as well to the desirability of including film in the curriculum at all grade levels.

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