



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1996 Volume III: Race and Representation in American Cinema

Hollywood and Higher Learning

Guide for Curriculum Unit 96.03.12
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My curriculum unit “Hollywood and Higher Learning” has been developed for use in high schools as a way to prepare students for college. It is specifically designed for grades 9-12 with a particular focus on 11th graders.

Students will view and analyze four films that show college life, both fictionally and in documentary form. Since preparing for college is a major focus in my junior level classes, this curriculum can be used as a “getting ready for college” unit. The aim is to use Hollywood as a way to pump my students up about college, especially marginal students who may not visualize themselves going to college at all.

The movies students will see are *School Daze*, *Higher Learning*, *Hoop Dreams*, and *Men at Morehouse*. Two are fictional, two are not. All deal, primarily, with issues that face African-American students. Bearing in mind that most movies, like most of Hollywood, are geared toward a white audience, the unit is designed for students who need to see people they can identify with. More broadly this curriculum is aimed at a group of kids who are not encouraged by their homes, their teachers, their schools or their communities, to go to college. It is for that kid who never in a million years dreamed she would be able to go to college.

The overall objectives for this unit are: 1) to introduce high school students to a variety of movies that deal with college; 2) to develop my students’ critical and analytical viewing skills; 3) to help my students make decisions about college by seeing what is out there and what is available to them; 4) to allow my students to reflect on some of the issues they will encounter in college such as sexual identity, racial identity, and academic course loads, so that they can be better prepared.

(Recommended for English, grade 11; and Critical Thinking, grade 9)

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