

# *AMERICAN FILM I – COURSE OUTLINE*

(July 2008)

**American Film I**  
**Credits – 5**  
**No Prerequisites**  
**Course # 142**

## **COURSE DESCRIPTION**

American Film I is an introductory course in the study of film as a medium for literary expression. Films will be examined within the context of their historical, social and political milieu. This course will provide students with a background in the history, the technical elements, the primary genres, the storytelling techniques and the thematic rendering of meaning in film. In addition, students will participate in hands on activities that provide them with a direct experience in the critique, promotion and creation of a film.

## **EQUAL OPPORTUNITY STATEMENT**

High Point Regional High School's curriculum and instruction are aligned to the State's Core Curriculum Content Standards and address the elimination of discrimination by narrowing the achievement gap, by providing equity in educational programs and by providing opportunities for students to interact positively with others regardless of race, creed, color, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, affectional or sexual orientation, gender, religion, disability or socioeconomic status.

## **CORE CURRICULUM CONTENT STANDARDS**

- 3.1. f, g, h
- 3.2. a, b, c, d,
- 3.3. a, b, c, d
- 3.4. a, b
- 3.5. a, b, c,

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

- Students will recognize and explain the essential elements of film technique and lexicon, such as cinematography, editing, sound techniques, storytelling structures, genres, and acting/directing styles;
- Students will identify narrative and visual styles of Hollywood movies that typify the specific historical context, with an emphasis on post-1939 films;

- Students will analyze characteristics of familiar Hollywood film genres such as the romantic comedy, film noir, the western, the musical, animation, the epic, war, thriller/horror, social commentary, and comedy;
- Students will trace the origins of modern film style to the roots of early film;
- Students will synthesize interrelationships between the popularity of Hollywood genres and the historical context of the specific production time;
- Students will write clear, coherent journal responses, formal critiques and essays about the films screened;
- Students will utilize knowledge gained in the study of film to write informed film reviews;
- Students will participate in class discussion about the films screened
- Students will create individual and group oral presentations of film interpretation and criticisms;
- Students will apply knowledge gained about the medium of film to create several film oriented projects;
- Students will compare and contrast the communication style/techniques of film/screenplay with novels/plays.

## **COURSE OUTLINE**

### **Introduction (4 weeks)**

- Investigation of film as an art form and communication;
- History: “Studio system, Hollywood narrative and visual style, progression from silent/black and white movies to talkies/color;
- Film language: Introduction to film terms, techniques, genres
- Critiquing styles
- Overview of myriad narrative structures
- Entire films and clips will be shown to illustrate concepts

### **Art Elements/Film Language (6 weeks)**

- Screenplay/Narrative Style
- Direction
- Editing
- Characters/Acting
- Cinematography
- Plot
- Setting
- Themes/Symbols
- Sound/Music
- Setting
- Costumes/Make-up
- Special Effects/Animation

### **Genres (8 weeks)**

- Western
- War
- Action
- Romantic Comedy
- Drama
- Comedy
- Historical Fiction
- Science Fiction
- Horror
- Film Noir
- Animation
- Social Commentary
- “Star” driven film
- Independent film
- Musical

### **Themes (8 weeks)**

In depth examination of the cultural, historical, cinematic Themes includes:

- Coming of Age
- Quest/Conquest
- Inhumanity/Hope
- The Outsider
- Epic Hero
- Ethnic Diversity
- Social Ideologies
- Myths/Archetypes
- Romance
- Heroism

### **Final Project (4 weeks)**

Students will incorporate all of course elements learned and, working in small groups, create original short films of a selected genre.

### **Actors/Directors**

An examination of influences in the direction of American movies by specific directors/actors includes:

#### **Directors**

Hitchcock, Spielberg, Scorsese, Stone, Kubrick, Chaplin, Welles, Lucas, Scott, Nichols, Disney, Altman, Howard, Coppola, Campion, Allen, Cassavetes, Huston, Wilder, Cukor, Griffith, Eastwood and others.

## Actors

Chaplin, Keaton, DeNiro, Streep, Hepburn, Gish, Wayne, Lemmon, Nicholson, Hoffman, Brando, Poitier, Washington, Penn, Peck, Duvall, Tracy, Newman, Jackson, Cage, Hackman, Hanks, Depp, Stewart, Bergman, Davis, Keaton, Christie, Benning, Sarandon, Thompson, Close, and others.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF TECHNOLOGY**

Films will be shown via DVD, VHS, or internet transmission

Use of Moviemaker, Photo Story, Power Point, Word and other media vehicles will be incorporated in students' presentations.

Internet research engines will be utilized

## **MATERIALS AND RESOURCES**

### **Films**

The following is a sample list of films that may be shown, either as clips or in their entirety, in order to demonstrate the film principles taught in the course. Not all the films listed will be used each year:

|  |                                     |                                   |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <i>Citizen Kane</i>                    | <i>Third Kind</i>                   | <i>LA Confidential</i>            |
| <i>The Great Train Robbery</i>         | <i>Moulin Rouge</i>                 | <i>Easy Rider</i>                 |
| <i>Robbery</i>                         | <i>Cocoon</i>                       | <i>Toy Story</i>                  |
| <i>Lawrence of Arabia</i>              | <i>Saving Private Ryan</i>          | <i>Finding Nemo</i>               |
| <i>The Graduate</i>                    | <i>Platoon</i>                      | <i>The Lion King</i>              |
| <i>Schindler's List</i>                | <i>Interview with a Vampire</i>     | <i>Ratatouille</i>                |
| <i>Singin' in the Rain</i>             | <i>The World According to Garp</i>  | <i>Shrek</i>                      |
| <i>Psycho</i>                          | <i>Thin Red Line</i>                | <i>Mash</i>                       |
| <i>North by Northwest</i>              | <i>Full Metal Jacket</i>            | <i>The Three Musketeers</i>       |
| <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> | <i>Bridge Over the River Kwai</i>   | <i>Forrest Gump</i>               |
| <i>2001: A Space Odyssey</i>           | <i>Chinatown</i>                    | <i>Pleasantville</i>              |
| <i>Apocalypse Now</i>                  | <i>Double Indemnity</i>             | <i>A Fish Called Wanda</i>        |
| <i>The Godfather</i>                   | <i>It's a Wonderful Life</i>        | <i>The Odd Couple</i>             |
| <i>Annie Hall</i>                      | <i>The Grapes of Wrath</i>          | <i>Grumpy Old Men</i>             |
| <i>E.T., The Extra-Terrestrial</i>     | <i>King Arthur</i>                  | <i>The Days of Wine and Roses</i> |
| <i>3:10 to Yuma</i>                    | <i>Gladiator</i>                    | <i>Pretty Woman</i>               |
| <i>The Unforgiven</i>                  | <i>The Mask of Zorro</i>            | <i>American History X</i>         |
| <i>Jaws</i>                            | <i>The Adventures of Robin Hood</i> | <i>Glory</i>                      |
| <i>King Kong</i>                       | <i>A Chorus Line</i>                | <i>Do the Right Thing</i>         |
| <i>Frankenstein</i>                    | <i>Amadeus</i>                      | <i>Fargo</i>                      |
| <i>American Graffiti</i>               | <i>Raiders of the Lost Ark</i>      | <i>Barton Fink</i>                |
| <i>Cabaret</i>                         |                                     | <i>House of Sand and Fog</i>      |
| <i>Close Encounters of the</i>         |                                     | <i>The Professional</i>           |
|  |                                     | <i>The Piano</i>                  |

|                              |                              |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <i>Stand by Me</i>           | <i>Seven Dwarfs</i>          |
| <i>Raging Bull</i>           | <i>Alien</i>                 |
| <i>Kramer v Kramer</i>       | <i>The Wild Bunch</i>        |
| <i>The Deer Hunter</i>       | <i>American Graffiti</i>     |
| <i>In the Line of Fire</i>   | <i>Pulp Fiction</i>          |
| <i>Bonnie and Clyde</i>      | <i>Goodfellas</i>            |
| <i>Spartacus</i>             | <i>Beetlejuice</i>           |
| <i>Face/Off</i>              | <i>Edward Scissorhands</i>   |
| <i>The Insider</i>           | <i>The Apartment</i>         |
| <i>Sleepless in Seattle</i>  | <i>Fargo</i>                 |
| <i>Philadelphia</i>          | <i>Rocky</i>                 |
| <i>Sophie's Choice</i>       | <i>Dances With Wolves</i>    |
| <i>The Great Escape</i>      | <i>Shane</i>                 |
| <i>What's Eating Gilbert</i> | <i>Silence of the Lambs</i>  |
| <i>Grape</i>                 | <i>Network</i>               |
| <i>A Clockwork Orange</i>    | <i>Rebel Without a Cause</i> |
| <i>The Shining</i>           | <i>Tootsie</i>               |
| <i>Fantasia</i>              |                              |
| <i>Snow White and the</i>    |                              |

### **Textbooks and Materials**

Excerpts and readings will be taken from the following sources:

- *The Art of Watching Film*, Boggs and Petrie, McGraw Hill, 2000.
- *Cinematic Storytelling*, Van Sijll, Jennifer, Wiese, 2005
- American Film Institute website: [www.afi.com](http://www.afi.com)
- Additional web material and periodical film reviews/handouts as they are researched

### **STUDENT EVALUATION METHODS**

Student assessment will be based on a combination of the following:

- Assigned reading exercises
- Assigned writing exercises, including journal entries and short critiques
- Class participation
- Quizzes/Tests on objective material
- Film reviews/Formal essays
- Quarterly project, including: movie trailer/poster, media movie critique and review, written screenplay, final movie short.
- Exams

### **DISTRICT POLICY**

The serious study of American film cannot be designed without the inclusion of films that are rated R. Some of the best work by America's most talented actors and directors

cannot be accurately portrayed without viewing these films. It is the district policy that all students have written parental permission to view these films.

### **COURSE POLICIES**

Student success in American Film I is contingent upon the following factors:

- Timely and conscientious completion of all reading, viewing and written assignments
- Consistent class attendance
- Active class participation in activities and discussion
- Timely completion of all marking period projects. These projects are designed to be cumulative in their synthesis of content; therefore, each step is important in the process.