



**Roberts, S. L., & Elfer, C. (Eds.). (2018). *Hollywood or history? An inquiry-based strategy for using film to teach United States history*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.**

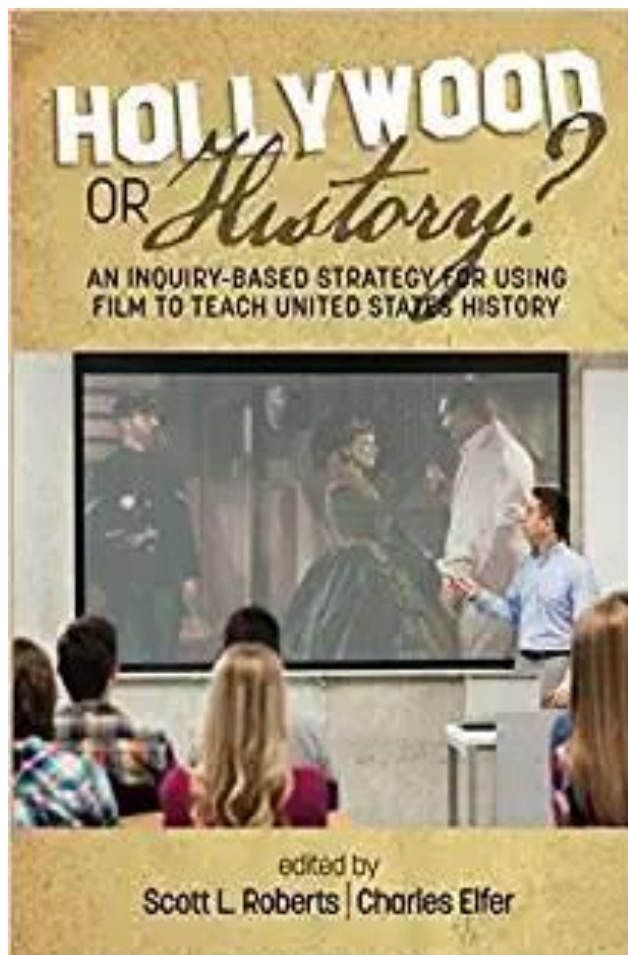
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Scott L. Roberts and Charles Elfer, editors of *Hollywood or History?* begin this work with a few notes that film viewers might expect. In the book's introduction, "Problems and Possibilities of Teaching with Film," the reader is reminded that using film in class is nothing new (Marcus & Stoddard, 2007; Metzger, 2010; Russell, 2007). The editors and contributors take on the task of sharing how film can be best used for instruction with thought and purpose. Each chapter builds on the editors' inquiry-based model, which they have entitled *Hollywood or History?* This focus on inquiry has the potential for creating engagement, although the book seems to maintain a largely teacher-centered approach when selecting and using films for classroom purposes. Nonetheless, the contributors dive into very practical uses of film right away, constantly tethered to the inquiry-based model. As such, the book promises to be a nexus of theory and practice.

Social studies teachers are, perhaps, known among other subjects for their use of film. In



my time in the classroom, I was reminded of the assumption that some history teachers might spend great amounts of time with film clips and lengthy videos with very little reflection. Whether that assumption was true or not, this book is a well-organized resource for mitigating that bias with intention and consideration. Teachers can point to the reflective steps and practices in these chapters as a way of demonstrating that film is more than a time-waster or entertainment venue.

The editors and contributors suggest that film has a unique place in the history classroom and holds great promise for meaningful instruction. The text, which reads like a series of lesson plans, is organized by time period, and reaches into a variety of creative avenues for teaching using film. The straightforward nature of this organization helps make the book more user-ready and teacher-friendly.

### **Classroom Ready**

From 1620 and the Plymouth Colony until Post-World War II, the rest of *Hollywood or History?* addresses the topic of film in practical, classroom-based terms. This grounded approach proves to be a highlight of the text. The ways contributors used the *Hollywood or History?* model demonstrated how teachers can take a unique vantage point, exploring and expanding a pedagogical framework. Each lesson is carefully designed, down to the estimated time for each instructional piece. For example, teaching strategies tied to using a film about colonization in chapter two are timed down to the minute, with activities ranging from 5 to 20 minutes each.

The text reads like the teaching portfolio of a very accomplished social studies teacher who wishes to pass on wisdom to other educators. The chapters would be ideal for the practitioner who wants to use film to immediately reach students in a U.S. history course, or for those in higher education who are training social studies teachers in how to

use media effectively. The text is useful as both a classroom resource and a textbook for preservice teachers.

The 27 contributors in this volume include teacher educators as well as instructors who are presently in the classroom. While other works treat the theoretical nature of media and film use, this book is unique in its consistent and thorough practitioner-oriented approach. Its exclusive focus on the history/social studies content area also marks this text as unique. An alternative text (Teasley & Wilder, 1996) addresses the possibilities of using film, but reaches across content areas in thematic units that are meant to captivate young adults.

Creative teachers can use this inquiry-based model as a way of rethinking film use in other content areas. While the book is oriented toward the history teacher, it has possibilities for being a useful resource for a wider range of teachers, including the upper elementary or secondary English or science teacher who wishes to think about ways to use film as a cross-disciplinary center of study. The strategy that the editors have sought to share is firmly rooted once the reader has noted its applications throughout multiple lesson-based and standards-guided time periods.

Lessons consistently begin with the wise approach of sparking interest and consistently close with a view to synthesizing information, which is a helpful reminder for the teacher with many years of experience and a wonderful example for the new educator. I appreciated the inclusion of differentiation strategies in the lessons as well. These ideas could be expanded and even form the basis of an entire book on their own.

### **Creative Approaches**

Within these chapters, a number of specific approaches stand out. It is clear that each contributor took time to tailor ideas based on specific historical periods and even

certain Hollywood titles, including *Twelve Years a Slave* (2013) and *The Rosa Parks Story* (2002). In chapter one, contributor Nancy Sardone shares a project evaluation rubric that not only has specific ties to instructional standards, but offers the depth of information necessary for a film-based representation of the story of Pocahontas. Such rubrics occur throughout the chapters with great detail, and the use of content area standards acts as a consistent anchor point for each period under consideration.

Another example is Ronald Morris's chapter on *Amish Neighbors*, a topic I would not necessarily have thought of as a lesson, but one that echoes in state standards nationwide. Morris includes a number of strategies for both formative and summative evaluation, as well as six teacher strategies for the lesson. Each time these teaching strategies are shared, contributors include a note that times are "highly flexible and should be adjusted according to number of sources used, length of introduction, period/block schedule, and so forth" (p. 236). This statement rings true for teachers who have experience in the classroom and know that the same activity can take different amounts of time for various reasons.

When it comes to reproducing lessons, there is much here to help teachers, although the use of a single graphic organizer became a little redundant. The organizer is reproduced many times throughout the chapters and could have been just as easily used once with references to its second presentation in an appendix. One addition that could have strengthened the book is student-created examples for some projects, such as posters and essays. On the other hand, tasks like debates and puppet shows are more appropriately described in the available rubrics.

Each chapter includes lesson plan procedures that are articulated in detail for maximum replicability in the classroom, and

additional options are often included. Noteworthy vocabulary is highlighted so that the seasoned or novice educator will be reminded of specific points to emphasize for instruction. In other places, links are included to online handouts. Links are also sometimes provided to clips on sites like YouTube.

The films that are considered run the gamut from Disney productions to more adult-oriented fare – for example, the 2010 version of *True Grit* forms part of the basis of a plan focused on the representation of women in the West. Some films may be more widely known, while others may lead educators to discover new titles. In the event that links are not provided, each chapter includes citations for materials, including films, so that teachers can find what they need to use in class with relative ease.

## Conclusions

With all of its detail and careful construction, *Hollywood or History?* makes a useful resource for the classroom bookshelf. It is particularly helpful for teachers who want to break the stereotypes of passive viewing and who wish to think about ways to use media in meaningful and content-oriented ways that engage students.

As a teacher who has an affinity for film, I appreciated the breadth of resources the contributors shared, as well as their efforts to provide creative ideas for ways that students might respond. This book is useful for both the practicing teacher and teacher educators. The way these lessons are broken down provide an insightful mentoring opportunity for considering the use of the pause button, and has the potential to lead to reflection about constructive ways longer films can be segmented so that they can be analyzed and discussed with students.

This book would make an effective text for a professional learning community of teachers who wish to explore how film can be

used effectively. The lesson ideas, in this case, could serve as a stimulus for other thoughts about how to go about instruction. *Hollywood or History?* has many possibilities as a resource

and has the potential to lead to further discussion about designing effective learning opportunities.

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## About the Reviewer


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