

Movie Review Assignment Modern World History

Provide a one-page review of one the movies or documentaries listed below. Your review should contain a plot synopsis including character and scene descriptions; assume that the reader is not very familiar with the film. An academic approach, ideally a historical approach, is required. What did you learn from the movie that you did not already know? What parts of the film struck you as historically accurate and what parts fictional to enhance the story plot? How does your own history and perspective affect how you perceive the film? Must be typed. **I can approve unlisted historical films on a case-by-case basis.**

Spirit of the Era Films

Forrest Gump – the United States in the mid-20th century
Citizen Kane – the United States in the early 20th century
All Quiet on the Western Front – the First World War
The Great Gatsby – the United States in the early 20th century
Earth (1998) – India in the mid-20th century
Gone with the Wind – the United States in the late 19th century
The Bonfire of the Vanities – the United States in the late 20th century
To Live – China in the mid-20th century
The Motorcycle Diaries – Latin America in mid-20th century
Farewell My Concubine – China in the early 20th century
Gamal Abdel Nasser (1998) – The Middle East in the mid-20th century
The Lives of Others – East Germany in the mid-20th century
1900 – Italy in the early 20th century

Miniseries Drama

War and Peace – the Russian nobility during the Napoleonic Age
Mad Men – a Madison Avenue advertising agency during the 1950's USA
Rome – the end of the Roman Republic and start of the Roman Empire
Juana Inés – the life of a Spanish nun in 17th century colonial Spanish America
Vikings – tales of the Norse Vikings during the Middle Ages
L'Allée du Roi – the life of Louis XIV and France in the 17th century
John Adams – the American Revolution and early American Republic
Mussolini: The Untold Story – a biography of the WWII Italian dictator
Suliman the Magnificent – the Ottoman ruling dynasty and court politics
Empress of China Series – the rise of Wu Zetian from concubine to Empress of China
Pope John Paul II – the story of a new pope in a changing church during the 20th century
Marco Polo Series – Marco Polo and his experiences in China under the Mongols
Sharpe – a British soldier during the Napoleonic Wars
Islam Empire of Faith – a documentary on Islamic empires in the Middle East
Roots – Slavery in North America during the 18th century
Hard Times – 19th century Industrial Britain

Documentaries

Spanish Civil War – the Spanish Civil War in the 1930's
The Ascent of Money – the history of finance in the modern era
Henry VIII: The Mind of a Tyrant – the life of a 16th century English King
Kenneth Clark's 1969 series Civilisation – Western Civilization since the fall of Rome
The Men Who Built America – the lives of American Gilded Age Industrialists
Lost Boys of Sudan – African refugees adjust to life in America
History of the Industrial Revolution Jeremy Black – the 1st Industrial Revolution in Britain
The 20th Century Walter Cronkite – a history of the 20th century
The Civil War Ken Burns – the American Civil War
When the World Spoke Arabic – the Arab Islamic World in the Middle Ages
Vietnam Ken Burns – the Vietnam War

General Idi Amin Dada: A Self Portrait – a documentary on a 20th century African dictator
Napoleon PBS Series – documentary on the life of Napoleon

Propaganda Films

The Eternal Jew – Anti-Semitic Nazi Germany
Battleship Potemkin – Pro-Revolutionary Soviet Union
Der Fuehrer's face – Anti-Nazi cartoon United States
Walt Disney's Education for Death– Anti-Nazi cartoon United States
1945 Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors English Subtitles – Anti-Western cartoon Imperial Japan
Shooting Range (Tir), 1979– Anti-American cartoon Soviet Union
Cairo Declaration 2015 – Pro-Chinese nationalism China
Valley of the Wolves: Iraq – Anti-American Turkey
Triumphant of Will – Pro-Fascism Nazi Germany
October: Ten Days That Shook the World, 1927 – Pro-Revolutionary Soviet Union
Breaking with Old Ideas – Pro-Revolutionary People's Republic of China
Mangal Pandey The Rising – Pro-Indian nationalism India

1500 – 1789

The Return of Martin Guerre – village life in 16th century France
Isabel – the 1st Queen of Spain
Luther 2003 – the start of the Protestant Reformation
1492: Conquest of Paradise – the arrival of Columbus
Silence – Christian missionaries in 17th century Japan
Amadeus – the life of musical rockstar Mozart in 18th century Europe
The Mission – Christian missionaries in 17th century South America
Carlos, Rey Emperador – The Spanish Century of Gold
The Three Musketeers 1993 – France in the 17th century
Blue Robe 1991– Christian missionaries in 17th century Canada
I, the Worst of All – the life of a Spanish nun colonial Spanish America
Cromwell – The English Civil war
Tsar film 2009 – Ivan the Terrible
Midwife's Tale – New England 17th century frontier life
The Youth of Peter the Great – the rise of the Russian Empire
Adanggaman – the African slave trade in Africa
Day of the Siege – the Ottoman siege of Vienna
The Splendors of the Mogul Dynasty – a documentary of Muslim Indian ruling superpower
Jodhaa Akbar – Indian Mogul court life
Nomad the Warrior – Central Asian 18th century pastoral lifestyle and conflict
Mistresses – France in the 17th century court life

1789 – 1914

La Révolution française – the French Revolution
Napoleon PBS Series – documentary on the life of Napoleon
Toussaint Louverture 2012– the Haitian Revolution
Hidalgo: La historia jamás contada – the Mexican Revolution & War of Independence
The Liberator – Simon Bolivar and the Latin American Revolutions
Manuela Saenz – the Latin American Revolutions
Master And Commander – 19th century seafaring during the Napoleonic Wars
Urban Slums - Timelines.tv History of Britain A12 – the 1st Industrial Revolution on Britain
PBS Mill Times David Macaulay – the 1st Industrial Revolution in North America
Amazing Grace– the abolitionist movement in Great Britain
Sharpe's Challenge – early British rule or the Raj in India
Camila (film) – republican Argentina in the early 19th century

Max Havelaar– Dutch colonialism in Indonesia in the 19th century
The Chess Players– 19th century India
Oliver! – 19th century Industrial Britain
Les Miserables– 19th century Revolutionary France
12 Years a Slave– antebellum or early 19th century American South
Lincoln – the American Civil War & the end of slavery
Garibaldi 1961 – Italian unification in the 19th century
Disraeli – biography of British Prime Minister in the Victorian Age
The Man who would be King – British Imperialism in the Victorian Age
Fiddler on the Roof – European Jewry and village life
My Fair Lady – class in 19th century Britain
Sunstroke, 2014 – Czarist Russia at the turn of the 20th century
The Good Earth– Imperial China at the turn of the 20th century
Zulu – British Imperialism in Africa
Things Fall Apart– the African experience to British Imperialism in Africa
The Prophet (animated) – the Ottoman Empire at the turn of the 20th century
The King and I – Thailand in the 19th century
55 Days at Peking – Imperial China at the turn of the 20th century
Congo: White King, Red Rubber, Black Death – Belgian colonization in Central Africa
King Leopold's Ghost – Belgian colonization in Central Africa
Breaker Morant – British Imperialism in South Africa
Farewell My Concubine – China in the early 20th century
Titanic – North America at the turn of the 20th century
The Last Emperor – the life of Chinese emperor Puyi in the early 20th century
Wilson (1944) – the life of American president Wilson in the early 20th century
And Starring Pancho Villa as Himself – the life of Pancho Villa during the Mexican Revolution
Viva Zapata! – the life of Emilio Zapata during the Mexican Revolution
Citizen Kane – the United States in the early 20th century
1911 (2011) – The Chinese Revolution of 1911
Royal cousins at war – the Royal Families of Europe before World War I
All Quiet on the Western Front – the experience World War I trench warfare
Joyeux Noel – World War I Christmas truce
Lawrence of Arabia – World War I in the Middle East
The Promise – The Armenian Genocide World War I
Einstein and Eddington – The discovery of modern physics
The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles - Chapter 19: The Winds Of Change – the end of WWI
The Best Intentions: The Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles – the end of WWI

1919 – 1945

Michael Collins – the Irish War of Independence
Battle of Warsaw 1920 – The Soviet-Polish War
The Great Gatsby – The Roaring American 1920's
Elmer Gentry – American Evangelism in the 1920's
Chicago – American urban life in the 1920's
Evita – Argentine politician of the early 20th century
Frida– Mexican artist of the early 20th century
Gandhi– Indian Independence movement
The Gathering storm – British Prime Minister Winston Churchill during the interwar years
Burnt by the Sun – the Soviet Union in the 1930's
Libertarias – the Spanish Civil War and anarchism
Rabbit-Proof Fence – Australia aborigine assimilation policy
Grapes of Wrath – Depression-era America
The Sound of Music– 1930's Austria

Tora! Tora! Tora! – the attack on Pearl Harbor
Inside the third Reich – inside Nazi Germany as seen by Albert Speer
Conspiracy 2001– the final solution
The Diary of Anne Frank – a child's experience of the Holocaust
Das Boot – the experience of World War II submarine warfare
Enemy at the Gates –World War II Eastern front warfare
Come and See – World War II the Eastern front partisans
Shindler's List – the Holocaust

1945 – Present

The Best Years of Our Lives – Post-War Adjustment
Earth (1998 film) – the partition of India
The Motorcycle Diaries (film) – Latin America in mid-20th century
The Sin – Egypt in 1940's
The Quiet American – Vietnam in the 1950's
Kundun – the early life of the Dalai Lama
The Lives of Others – East Germany in the mid-20th century
Gamal Abdel Nasser Egypt – Arab Nationalism in the 1950's
Nine Cinema Italiano – Italian cinema industry in the mid-20th century
Pope John Paul II – the story of a new pope in a changing church during the 20th century
The Battle of Algiers – the French-Algerian War
13 Days – the Cuban Missile Crisis
BBC Biafra war – the Nigerian-Biafra War
The Godfather – American-Italian crime family
1968 – Stephen Talbot's PBS documentary on the Paris Riots
To Live – China in the mid-20th century and the Cultural Revolution
City of God – Brazil slumlife in the mid-20th century
Goodfellas – American organized crime
American Gangster – American-Black crime family
Mobutu, King of Zaire – African dictator of the Congo
Munich – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict
Fat Cats – Egyptian society in the 1970's
All the President's Men – the Watergate scandal
Apollo 13 (1995) – Space Travel
The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin – depiction of rule of African dictator
The Wild Geese – Mercenaries in Africa
Lost – Egyptian society in the 1980's
Charlie Wilson's War – Washington politics and Afghanistan
Salvador – Central America & United States 1980's
Narcos – international drug trafficking 1980's
Persepolis (2007) – coming-of-age story of Persian cosmopolitan
Argo – the Iran hostage crisis
Bashu, the Little Stranger – Life in 1980's Iran
El Norte – Central & United States migration 1980's
The Iron Lady – British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher
Hotel Rwanda – Central Africa the Rwandan Genocide
Nelson Mandela: Long Walk to Freedom – South Africa apartheid
The Wolf of Wallstreet – United States high finance corruption
Queen of Katwe – Central Africa female chess champion checkmates life
The Social Network – the Internet Age and the rise of Facebook
Steve Jobs – the Computer Revolution and Apple company
Crazy Rich Asians – haute rich lifestyles in the 21st century

Guidelines for History Movie Review

Developed from:

Mary Lynn Rampolla, *A Pocket Guide to Writing in History*, 5th Edition, Bedford St. Martins.

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/bookrevpre.html>

<http://www.angelfire.com/journal2/englishresource/filmreview.html>

Film reviews are an important type of historical assignment because film and other visual texts have become increasingly important historical sources. Film reviews demonstrate your ability to “read” a film critically and analytically. Preparation for doing a film review will make watching a film an active learning exercise. Students sometimes feel unqualified to complete such an assignment; after all, the director of a film is a professional. However, even if you cannot watch a film from the same level of experience and knowledge as the director, you *can* write an effect review if you understand what the assignment requires. If you use film as a historical source, you will need to approach or “read” a film with the same critical and analytical skills that you would apply to a written text.

Just as there are different kinds of written texts, so too are there different kinds of films. The most common types of film historians use are documentaries and feature films. Identifying which type of film you are dealing with is the essential first step in writing a film review.

Documentaries:

Documentaries are films that use primary sources (like photographs, paintings and documents) and commentaries on those sources by various authorities (such as historians, biographers and eyewitnesses) to construct a narrative of a historical figure or event. For this reason, documentaries should be considered secondary sources.

Documentaries about events of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are able to make use of a unique primary source: footage. Footage is a direct film or videotape recording of an event.

Footage can be produced by professionals, such as television news videographers, or by amateurs, like Abraham Zapruder’s 8mm film of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Footage is a primary source since it records events as they happen.

A documentary filmmaker’s use of primary sources such as footage must be viewed critically. Filmmakers, like writers, choose what to record. Usually, however, they are filming with a particular purpose, and sometimes with a particular audience in mind. Moreover, footage that makes it way to a news broadcast has been cut and edited. In evaluating a documentary that uses footage, it is useful to know why and by whom the original footage was shot and whether and for what purposes it has been edited.

Feature Films

Feature films are films designed primarily as entertainment. They sometimes feature famous actors and always aim at box-office success. Historical rigor is not usually their primary concern, so we should not be surprised to find that such films vary dramatically in the accuracy with which they depict the period, events, and historical figures they ostensibly portray. At one end of the spectrum are films like *The Return of Martin Guerre*, which is based on a true story about a peasant who abandoned his family and the imposter who “returned” and successfully took his place. The director, Daniel Vigne, consulted historical documents, attempted faithfully to recreate the material culture of the period, and make extensive use of the expertise of historian

Natalie Zemon Davis as a consultant. Consequently, this film might be considered a secondary source for our understanding of French peasant life in seventeenth-century France. In contrast, in his 1916 film *Joan the Woman*, legendary director Cecil B. DeMille took serious liberties with the historical accounts of Joan of Arc, inventing a love interest for her and linking her story with the English efforts against the Germans in France during World War One. DeMille's film has virtually no value as a secondary source for the history of Joan of Arc, but it is a valuable primary source for understanding American attitudes towards the First World War and the role of filmmakers in encouraging the United States to join the conflict. This points to an important consideration: all feature films can be viewed as a primary source for the cultural and social history of the period in which they were made. This is not conditional on whether the film's depiction of historical events are correct or not.

General Guidelines for Writing about Film:

- 1.) **Pay close attention to your assignment.** Be sure you have a clear understanding of your purpose and audience. Are you, for example writing a complete movie review or a more formal analysis of only certain elements. Does your assignment ask you to address any specific questions? Is your intended audience a group of general viewers, perhaps other students, or are you writing for a particular audience, such as parents who might wish to know if this film is appropriate for young children or middle-aged newspaper readers? Have a good understanding of the goals for this essay will help you to focus your attention on the parts of the film relevant to your assignment.
- 2.) **Prepare in advance of your first screening.** If you are writing a movie review or formal analysis, you may need to include certain kinds of production information about the film. To save time and stress, obtain the information you need before you watch the film. It might be helpful, for example, to know the names of the director, the major actors, the screenwriter, the studio or film company, and the date of release. You might want to watch the "extra features" or documentaries included in many special edition DVDs before watching the film. Does the movie into a particular genre or category, such as horror, science fiction, mystery, adventure, musical, romantic comedy, or domestic drama? Some combination of genres (comedy-adventure) or a recognizable subcategory of a genre (buddy cups, teen-slasher horror flick, *film noir* mystery)? Some reviewers like to have a brief plot summary before they see the movie; other viewers want to the experience the film free of pre-conceived ideas or expectations. When in doubt, always know thyself.
- 3.) **Try to arrange multiple viewing opportunities.** It's difficult to write any kind of detailed treatment of a film you have seen only once, as most viewers need at least one screening just to take in plot and character development. If the choice of film is yours, you may find it much easier to write about one that is on DVD so that you can see it more than once as well as replay specific scenes for closer study. Multiple screenings may be necessary if you plan to quote dialogue, which must be presented accurately.
- 4.) **Take notes as you watch.** It's easier to take notes while watching a film at home than it is in a darkened movie theater or even in a classroom. As you watch, take notes on the plot or story line, the sequence of events (told chronologically, in flashback, or in some other nontraditional way?) the time and places in which the narrative occurs, the character development and other plot points that seem especially striking. Jot down your reactions to key scene lines of dialogue in the film, and make notes on parts that may be

particular assignment. As the film unfolds, takes notes on the commentary on particular values or cultural assumptions.

- 5.) **Make more notes immediately after the screening.** While the film is fresh in your mind try to answer questions for yourself. Did you like or dislike the film? Do you have a mixed reaction to the film? What were the best or worst parts? Try to have specific reasons for your opinions. Try to use your critical thinking to ascertain what is the film “about”? That is, what larger themes, values, or ideas does this film communicate to its viewers? Even movies that are offered as “purely entertainment” have a point of view to the action that is presented in their stories. Is the film positive, satiric, or cynical about it that you agree or disagree with the stances taken in the film?
- 6.) **Review your notes in light of your assignment’s purpose.** At this point you have enough ideas to draft a tentative thesis (and perhaps an essay about your particular assignment? Often movie review essays clarify two or three main points about the film. To help you select important points, try rearranging your notes into useful groups. Which idea is the most promising in order to illustrate and support your thesis?
- 7.) **Watch the film again with a more analytical eye.** During this screening perhaps with repeated viewings of particular scenes, you can focus attention on those specific aspects of the film you want to write about. Concentrate on the most powerful images that you remember from the first viewing. Why is the film titled as it is? Asking “why” as you watch the film a second time may uncover interesting questions about the film that you want to answer.
- 8.) **As you begin to draft, be aware of certain conventions particular to know about the film.** For example, most movie review essays will include a brief summary of the movie’s story. It may be clearer for people who have not seen the film to read the summary in a paragraph near the essay’s beginning, though in other essays the plot may be effectively interwoven throughout the discussion of your essay. Special note: if presenting a complete plot summary would give away the ending, the name of the villain, or other information that would ruin the experience for a potential moviegoer, you can acknowledge that you are holding back certain information. Or you can adopt the hand phrase “spoiler alert,” which professional reviewers use to warn readers to skip the next sentence or two if they wish to remain in the dark about a particular section of the movie.
Another consideration for the writer is whether to use “I” in a movie review essay. Although some famous movie reviewers consistently use “I” in their review, most do not, so ask your instructor which choice is preferable for your assignment. (In most cases, I prefer a review mostly in third person with only “first person” permissible in the conclusion.)
- 9.) **Use clear, precise language.** As you draft and revise, assume that your audience had not watched the film and consequently cannot visualize what you have seen. Make your discussions as clear as possible, using detailed and expressive language to re-create the images you are recalling. For ease of discussion, writers on film sometimes make use of a few cinematic terms to help communicate what they saw. Be careful that your essay does not become overly technical.
- 10.) **In your final draft, it’s wise to recheck the film to ensure your accuracy.** Make sure you have the characters’ names right and that any lines you have quoted are correctly transcribed. Remember that the film titles should be underlined or printed in italics, not placed within quotation.

Format of a film review

A good film review has four main parts:

1.) Credits:

First page of the review should have: title and year of the film, genre, director, screenwriter, composer, main actors.

For example look at www.rottentomatoes.com or www.imbd.com

2.) Plot: Synopsis or summary of plot

Examine Place and time of the movie (Where does the movie take place? Is the story chronological or flashback?) , background (society, country, kind of people), Genre (horror, comedy, drama).

3.) Characters: Psychical, psychological, age, national, social/personal background.

4.) Conclusion: What message is being told? What was the director's purpose or intention or theme of the film? Compare with other realities you know (your country, historical event, theme or event, or compare with another film by same director. Provide your own opinion.

Skeletal Structure of the Film Review

1. Title – catchy, can indicate if review will be positive or negative, you can play with words to make it funny or different
2. Paragraph 1 – Opening paragraph – can start to summarize film and give early suggestions about your general view of it (positive/negative)
3. Paragraph 2 – Start or continue summary of film, don't give details about the ending or else no one will go and see the film!!
4. Paragraph 3 and 4 – positive things you thought about the film, what did you like? Why? Use descriptive words, think about the story, setting, effects used, music used
5. Paragraph 5 and 6 – negative things you thought about the film, what didn't you like? Why? Comment on the same type of things that you mentioned in paragraphs 3 and 4
6. Paragraph 7 and 8 – Characterization – talk about the characters, did you like them? Did the actors play them well? What was it about their portrayal that you liked or didn't like? Other impressions of the characters, will certain audience members be able to relate to certain characters? How? Will certain audience members not like certain characters? Why not?

7. Paragraph 9 – Final comments – general comments that summarize your view of the film, you may want to say something inspiring to get the reader to want to go out and see the film or you might say something that would want them not to go and see it! After the paragraph you would give it a star rating out of 5 to indicate your rating for it.

Make sure your essay has:

Start with a good lead. You want your reader to be interested in what you have to say. Grab her in that first or "lead" paragraph in one of several ways: Start with a great quote from the movie, and explain how it reflects the movie; refer to the reputation of the actor or director and compare it to how he or she did in this movie; compare this movie to another well-known film in a few sentences or two; explain what your expectation was, and then if it was fulfilled or not. Then end that first paragraph with your opinion statement.

- Evaluated the plot, discuss important turning points in the film, important scenes which reveal character, the opening and closing scenes and the importance of subplots;
- If the movie contains actors, as most do, detail who is starring in the movie and how well you think they acted;
- Analyzed the setting and what it tells you as a viewer;
- Analyzed characters, their dialogues and other interactions;
- Give details about how well the movie was shot and directed;
- Describe the musical score or music of the movie and how it impacts the film.

Final Tips:

- Be honest and open-minded.
- Since you are sharing your ideas and impressions, be ready for negative responses. It's okay because other people have made up their mind, too.
- Be interesting, informative and creative.

Prewriting Questions for Book, Movie, or Play Reviews

The following questions are designed to help you generate and focus your ideas when writing a book, movie, or film review. You won't need to answer all of these questions for your paper, but many of the answers will help you discover information and focus your thinking.

What questions

- What are you reviewing? What is it about? What's the plot?
- What's the theme?
- What is the author's/director's purpose?
- What genre or classification does it fit?
- What is the tone? What is the point of view? What's the mood?

When and Where questions

- When was this done? Or when does the action take place?
- Where was this done? Or where does the action take place?

Who questions

- Who wrote it, directed it, or acted in it? What else have they done?
- Who are the main characters?
- Who's the intended audience?
- Who has said what about this? Why?

How questions

- How does it convey its main point, mood, or theme? How did the audience react to it?
- How well does it fulfill its purpose?

Evaluation questions

- Did I like this in general? Why?
- Did I agree with the main theme/purpose? Why or why not?
- What specifically did I like/dislike? Why?
- Did the author/actors/director do a good job? Why or why not?
- How could it be improved? Why would particular changes help?

After you have answered these questions, begin selecting and organizing the information that you'll include in your paper.

Common words and phrases used in film reviews that you might want to use in your own reviews

spectacular visual effects, excessive violence, breathtaking, evocative, mood, atmosphere, poorly, unsuccessful, detail, scenery, irresistible, perfect, moments, plot, this movie has been compared to ____ because, wonderful, hilarious, momentum, unexpected plot twists, unbelievable, phenomenal, hype, suspense, disappointing, confusion/confused, fake, imitation, genre, unoriginal, typical, thrilled, was a very moving portrayal, quality of the film, I was impressed by, credible, cliché, a mixture of, classic, captivating