

WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
Valhalla, New York

COURSE TITLE	Literature Into Film- Honors
COURSE CREDIT	Three credits per semester
PREREQUISITES	Successful completion of Composition and Literature I
INSTRUCTOR	Dr. Costanzo
COURSE OBJECTIVES	<p>The course will help students:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Read and understand film as a form of literature, recognizing the traditional elements of fiction--plot, character, setting, point of view, symbol, theme--in one of our culture's most recent and influential forms of storytelling.</li><li>2. Contrast written, oral, and visual modes of storytelling in order to appreciate the major differences between film and earlier forms of narrative.</li><li>3. Develop their film literacy: in other words, to teach them how to identify and use the basic technical and critical vocabulary of motion pictures</li><li>4. Analyze film as a cultural phenomenon: how it reflects and shapes the changing nature of our heroes, values, and beliefs.</li><li>5. Question their own roles as passive spectators, and to increase their ability to watch films actively and critically</li><li>6. Develop clear, consistent criteria for evaluating films as art, as personal experiences, as historical documents, and as expressions of ideology</li></ol>
REQUIRED TEXTS:	<p>Costanzo. <i>Great Films and How to Teach Them</i>. NCTE, 2004.</p> <p>Ken Kesey. <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i>. Signet. Stephen King, <i>Different Seasons</i>, Signet Mario Puzo, <i>The Godfather</i>, Penguin</p>

## OFFICE HOURS

My hours are posted on the door of my office, Science 360. Please make an appointment if you wish to see me before or after class. If you need to reach me by telephone, call 785-6930. My email address is <bill.costanzo@sunywcc.edu>

## METHODS OF INSTRUCTION:

Students will read imaginative literature and view feature films. Screenings in class will be followed by close visual analysis of selected scenes, comparison with printed texts, class discussions, multimedia presentations, group projects, and individual writing assignments.

## WEBSITES:

Some materials will be available online through WebCT. Please see my homepage on the college website's faculty pages ([www.sunywcc.edu](http://www.sunywcc.edu)) for updated information related to this course.

## GENERAL TOPICS

### I. Film as Storytelling

A. From *Beowulf* to *The Terminator*, from Penelope to Erin Brockovich, our heroes and our modes of telling stories have changed with the times. How do these changes reflect the evolution of our values, our cultural beliefs, our need for art and entertainment? What do they tell us about ourselves?

B. In Britain, storytelling began as a spoken art and developed into a written literary tradition. Filmmaking extends that tradition in ways that borrow from the past yet offer something new. What are the secrets of film's appeal?

C. Who are our contemporary fictional heroes? What are their stories? How do their images and actions compare to their predecessors in the parade of literary protagonists since Anglo-Saxon times?

### II. Elements of Fiction / Elements of Film

A. The elements of fiction--character, plot, setting, point of view, and so on--are basic to stories whether we read them on the page or view them on the screen.

B. Yet films represent these elements through different means. While a novel may tell us what a

character looks like, says, or thinks, a film shows us an actor who moves a certain way, dresses just so, and speaks with a distinctive intonation. The actor's performance is an interpretation of the script. When we read a novel, who is the interpreter? How are other elements of fiction interpreted by filmmakers and represented on the screen?

C. The filmmaker's toolbox is larger than the writer's. While a poet shapes messages with rhythm and rhyme and a playwright tells stories chiefly through dialogue, the filmmaker uses cameras, actors, sets, and microphones. The art of film narration is an art of color, lighting, framing, motion, sound, and editing. The Hollywood style wields these cinematic tools in such a way as to erase the signs of its own construction while drawing us in to its plot-driven, character-centered world.

D. Who is the author of a film? Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Orwell's *1984* are clearly their own work, but any film is the collaborative effort of a team that may include actors, camera operators, lighting experts, set designers, editors, and many other talents as well as the director.

### III. The Art of Adaptation

A. Nearly all the heroes of great literature have appeared in movies. From Ulysses and Antigone to Macbeth and Robinson Crusoe, from Emma and Frankenstein to Don Quixote and Orlando, the leading figures of world fiction and their imagined worlds have been adapted for the screen.

B. Why are so many films adaptations? What is involved in transforming written fiction into film? What makes a faithful adaptation? Where do we draw the line between a film's fidelity to its source and its cinematic integrity?

### IV. Evaluating Film as Literature

C. What makes a good movie? a classic?

D. Can a movie be judged as literature in its own right?

C. What personal and cultural criteria can serve as guidelines for judging the merits of a film?

### GRADES

Your course grade will depend on your performance in five areas:

Group Presentation	(20%)
Individual Project	(20%)
Final Exam	(20%)
Quizzes	(10%)
Class Participation	(30%)

## ATTENDANCE

Attendance is vital to your learning and to the success of others in this class. The seminar approach requires active participation from every student. Since each day is the equivalent of one three fifty-minute classes, no more than two unexcused absences are permitted.

## WEEKLY TOPICS, SCREENINGS, AND READINGS

1	1/19	Topic: The Art and Business of Adaptation Screenings: Excerpts from <i>To Kill a Mockingbird</i> , <i>The Graduate</i> , <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> , and <i>Lord of the Rings</i>
2	1/26	Topics: The Evolution of Storytelling / Elements of Fiction Screening: <i>to be announced</i> <b>Read Chapter 1 in <i>Great Films</i>: "The Art of Fiction Film"</b>
3	2/02	Topics: How Stories Signify / Word and Image Screening: <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <b>Read Chapter 2 in <i>Great Films</i>: "The Language of Film"</b> <b>Begin reading Ken Kesey</b>
4	2/9	Topic: How Movie are Made Screening: <i>One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest</i> <b>Read Chapter 3 in <i>Great Films</i>: "The Technology of Film"</b> <b>Finish reading Kesey / Read Chapter 15 in <i>Great Films</i></b>
5	2/16	Topics: Story, Script, and Screen Screening: <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> <b>Begin reading Stephen King</b>
6	2/23	Screening: <i>The Shawshank Redemption</i> <b>Finish reading King / Read Chapter 19 in <i>Great Films</i></b>
7	3/02	Screening: <i>The Godfather</i> <b>Begin reading Mario Puzo/</b>
8	3/9	Screening: <i>The Godfather</i> <b>Finish reading Puzo / Read Chapter 14 in <i>Great Films</i></b>
Spring Break		
9	3/23	Group 1
10	3/30	Group 2
11	4/6	Group 3
12	4/13	Group 4
13	4/20	Group 5
14	4/27	Group 6
15	5/04	To be announced
Final Exam		



## GROUP PRESENTATION

This assignment is an opportunity to learn more about the art of adaptation by preparing a class presentation with a group of other students. Since this is a major portion of your grade (20%), you will want to give this project considerable time and serious attention.

With your group, select a movie based on a novel or short story. Be sure to consult with me about your choice. The movie should be worth researching, analyzing, and discussing. It should also be short enough to show in a 150-minute session with enough time for a brief introduction at the beginning and a general discussion at the end. Your group will be responsible for preparing the introduction and leading the discussion.

To prepare for your presentation, you will need to do some research and analysis. Learn about the film: when it was made, who made it, and how it was produced. Consider the director, scriptwriter, and actors, but also those who made the story come alive by fashioning costumes, designing sets, applying make-up, handling the camera, and creating the sound track. Find out what critics said about the film and how the public responded when it originally appeared. You should also familiarize yourself with the film's literary source. Pay special attention to a few key scenes and notice how they play out on the page and on the screen. Apply what you have learned from the course to evaluate the film as a story, an adaptation, and a film in its own right.

Your presentation will have four components:

- 1) **Introduction.** This should be brief, but precise and informative. Give the class enough background, based on your research, so they can appreciate the film's place in history, its relationship to other films, and its significance for our time. Explain its literary source, and summarize the key facts about its production. Prepare your audience for the discussion by suggesting what to look for in the film.
- 2) **Screening.** The Media Theatre in the library is equipped for showing videocassettes, DVDs, laserdiscs, and computer-based multimedia. It is your responsibility to obtain a legal copy of the film in any of these formats and screen it for the class. You can assume that we have permission to show any film in the library's permanent collection.
- 3) **Discussion.** Prepare a handout (twenty copies) with five to ten good discussion questions. Use these to lead the class in a critical exploration of the movie at the end. You may want to consider questions of fidelity to the original, technical aspects of the film, ethical issues, or cultural differences as well as personal responses and assessments.
- 4) **Portfolio.** Submit your research materials in the form of a portfolio. I would like to see what books, articles, films, Internet or other resources you consulted in preparation for the presentation. All material should be printed or typed. Include a formal bibliography (your group must consult a minimum of four works, but most groups read about ten and some use more than twenty for their research.) Follow the MLA format for bibliographies, and be sure you use every work on the list.

Your presentation will be evaluated according the following criteria: film selection, research, delivery, ability to engage the class in a meaningful discussion, and portfolio materials.

### INDIVIDUAL PROJECT: COMPARATIVE ESSAY

(First Draft Due: 3/30 / Final Draft Due 4/20)

This is a chance to work on your own, applying what you have learned about literature and film to two works of your choosing. Select a movie adaptation and read the novel, play, or story on which it was based. Then write a comparative essay, keeping the following questions in mind:

- Why did you make this selection? Did you read the book first or see the film? What appealed to you initially about the story? What did you expect or hope to learn by comparing the two works?
- Briefly identify the elements of fiction in the story: the main features of the plot, major characters, setting, narrative perspective, tone, and theme. Who are the protagonists and antagonists? What are the chief conflicts and ideas?
- What makes the writer's style distinctive? Take note of any unusual narrative techniques, use of description, dialogue, humor, melodrama, or irony. How do you evaluate the writing in relation to other literature you know?
- Comment on the filmmaking. What special uses does the movie make of lighting, color, framing, motion, or sound? What about the acting, costumes, makeup, and set design?
- Research the film's production. Check out interviews, books, magazines, bonus features on the DVD, and websites. Who was responsible for directing, producing, writing the script, casting, location scouting, and post-production work (editing, music, and sound effects)? What did you learn about the process of adapting the story from page to screen?
- How closely does the movie follow the book? Does the film accurately represent the details of the story and its characters? Do the actors look and behave as you imagined them while reading? Compare specific moments in the movie to comparable passages in the book. Does the adaptation faithfully recreate the spirit of the original?
- Give your final assessment. What are your evaluative criteria? How do you rate the movie as an adaptation and a work of cinematic literature in its own right?