

Exercise: War Films

Time: 1/2 hour, plus homework

Supplies: A way to show VHS or DVD (optional)

Ask everyone to watch two films: one that glorifies or justifies war (The Green Berets, The Alamo, Henry V, Patton, Braveheart, Rambo, Troy, Gladiator etc.) and one anti-war film. Propose this several weeks prior to ensure everyone has time to find, watch and reflect upon their films. Allot some time for discussion: Are all war films anti-war to some extent? What do most people learn about war through film? Is that important?

Some anti-war films: **Dr. Strangelove** (1964); **Apocalypse Now** (1979); **Slaughterhouse Five** (1972), **Good Morning Vietnam** (1987), **M*A*S*H** (1972), **Born on the Fourth of July** (1989); **The Killing Fields** (1984); **Gallipoli** (1981); **The Deer Hunter** (1978); **Coming Home** (1978); **Oh! What a Lovely War** (1969); **All Quiet on the Western Front** (1930; 1979); **Grand Illusion** (1937); **Duck Soup** (1930); **The Mouse That Roared** (1959); **Catch-22** (1970); **Friendly Persuasion** (1956); **Salvador** (1986); **Wag the Dog** (1998); **Die Brücke** (1959); **The Americanization of Emily** (1964). And some lesser-known ones:

The Burmese Harp (1956) A Japanese soldier in WWII, a self-taught lute player, is shocked by the horrors of war and vows to live a life of prayer.

Grave of the Fireflies (*Hotaru no Haka*) (1988) In this animé, two orphaned Japanese children in the aftermath of WWII are forced to try to survive amidst widespread famine and the callous indifference of their countrymen.

How I Won the War (1967) In this absurdist film, World War II British soldiers die one by one, only to be replaced by ghostly World War I-era soldiers; by the film's end the only man still alive is the one who refused to fight.

The Bedsitting Room (1967) by the same director is about Britain after WWII and is a good companion film.

Johnny Got His Gun (1972) A young American soldier, hit by a shell on the last day of WWI, lies in a hospital bed, a quadruple amputee who has lost his eyes, ears, mouth and nose, tries to communicate his wish that he be put on show in a carnival as a demonstration of the horrors of war.

Joyeux Noel (2004) On Christmas Eve during World War I French, German and British soldiers met in a "no-man's-land" to exchange candy and cigarettes, converse, sing and even play soccer.

King of Hearts (1966) A Scottish soldier, sent to a small French town at the end of WWI to disarm a bomb, unknowingly leaves the door to the insane asylum open while being chased by the Germans. The film ends with the question of who is more insane: those in the asylum or the soldiers on the battlefield.

Lord of War (2005) An arms dealer begins to question the nature of his business and whether what he is doing for a living is moral.

A Midnight Clear (1992) Set in 1944 France, an American Intelligence Squad locates a German platoon wishing to surrender rather than die in Germany's final war offensive.

No Man's Land (2001) Academy Award-winning satire of the war in the Balkans is a black comedy grounded in the brutality and horror of war. Stuck in an abandoned trench between enemy lines, a Serb and a Bosnian play the blame game while a wounded soldier lies helplessly on a land mine.

Paths of Glory (1955) The title is taken from the Thomas Gray poem *Elegy Written in a Country Church-yard*: "The boast of heraldry, the pomp of pow'r, / And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave, / Awaits alike th'inevitable hour. / The paths of glory lead but to the grave." Based loosely on the true story of five French soldiers executed for mutiny during World War I.