

Overview

At the heart of The Story of Movies curriculum are National Film Study Standards developed by The Film Foundation. The goal of the standards is to guide teachers and educational administrators in helping students in grades 6–8 develop literacy in moving images. The core academic-content standards have five thematic strands:

- 1.0 **Film Language.** Students learn to read and interpret visual text by developing a film vocabulary, identifying editing techniques, and analyzing film elements within selected scenes.
- 2.0 **Historical and Cultural Contexts.** Students understand that a film is both a historical/social document and a cultural artifact. Students analyze social issues presented in film and form conclusions about the ways in which film influences and is influenced by the society in which it is produced.
- 3.0 **Production and Creative Expression.** Students understand that film is an expression of a director's personal vision produced through a collaborative process. Students understand and distinguish the various filmmaking roles that contribute to the final work of art.
- 4.0 **Viewers' Response and Aesthetic Valuing.** Students understand that a film is a work of art. Students describe, interpret, and analyze a film's visual design. They respond to and make informed judgments about film, deriving personal meaning from the work. They express their viewpoints through oral and/or written presentations.
- 5.0 **Cross-Curricular Connections.** Students first tap their knowledge of other disciplines to study a film. They then apply what they have learned about film to other disciplines, making connections between film and literature/language arts, film and history/social studies, film and other arts, and film and sciences.

Outcome Levels

The National Film Study Standards emphasize depth of knowledge rather than mere exposure to film clips. The curriculum program features three feature films for in-depth study over a period of four to six weeks each. These films are *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962, directed by Robert Mulligan), *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939, directed by Frank Capra), and *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951, directed by Robert Wise). Each film focuses on significantly different subject matters — American government and media, war and the development of atomic weapons, and civil rights and family values. The study units are applicable across all three grades, rather than being grade-specific. To encourage flexibility in the classroom and to allow teachers to adapt materials to grade levels and student abilities, the content and outcomes described in these national standards are grouped into three competency levels:

- Level I = Basic
- Level II = Intermediate
- Level III = Advanced

The lessons and activities for each of the three film units bridge these three levels. However, some learning outcomes are film-specific. Examples include the following: Propaganda in moving images is taught only in the unit for *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*; characteristics of the science fiction film genre is taught only in the unit for *The Day the Earth Stood Still*; voice-over narration is a film-language term taught only in the unit for *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Nevertheless, teachers who complete the entire Story of Movies program for middle school over one to three years will touch upon all learning outcomes on all three levels.

Why Develop National Film Study Standards?

With the passage of Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the national education-reform legislation that includes development of world-class standards, the arts have been recognized by Congress for the first time as a fundamental academic subject. Film is a uniquely collaborative art form. Establishing national standards for film study provides an outline of what children should know and be able to accomplish. The standards establish a foundation for study of moving images throughout middle school.

1.0 Film Language

Content Standard	Outcomes by Level (I = Basic II = Intermediate III = Advanced)
1.1— Developing a film vocabulary	<p>I: Students explain what is meant by frame, shot, scene, composition, key lighting, visible and invisible sounds.</p> <p>II: Students identify high-angle and low-angle shots, distinguish shots of varying camera distances, identify basic camera movements, identify high-key and low-key lighting.</p> <p>III: Students understand what is meant by contrast, depth, and texture; distinguish between objective and subjective point-of-view (POV) shots; describe three principles of lighting a frame — direction, intensity, and quality; identify elements of sound layering.</p>
1.2— Understanding film content	<p>I: Students identify basic story elements found in all film narratives, including character, setting, conflict, rising action, conflict resolution, and theme.</p> <p>II: Students identify characteristics of film genres, specifically film drama and science fiction film; identify the cause-and-effect events that lead to a story's climax; identify flashback and foreshadowing in stories told visually.</p> <p>III: Students explain both internal and external conflicts as expressed in a film; identify scenes that reveal parallel story lines.</p>
1.3— Understanding a film's narrative structure	<p>I: Students describe the purpose of each of the three acts in a film's narrative structure.</p> <p>II: Students describe the inciting incident in act 1; identifying rising action in act 2; identify falling action in act 3.</p> <p>III: Students identify shots and scenes that reveal expository information; explain the connection between the inciting incident and the climax; explain how voice-over narration reveals expository details and serves as a unifying element in all three acts.</p>
1.4— Identifying editing techniques	<p>I: Students explain the difference between <i>real</i> time and <i>reel</i> time; identify scene transitions, including cut, dissolve, and fade.</p> <p>II: Students explain what is meant by montage; explain how juxtaposition of images in a sequence creates meaning and affects reel time.</p> <p>III: Students explain what is meant by continuity and pacing and understand how continuity and pacing can both compress and expand time in a film.</p>
1.5— Analyzing elements of film composition	<p>I: Students describe how the arrangement of elements within a single frame suggests meaning; describe how image and sound work together to create meaning.</p> <p>II: Students understand the principle of thirds in composition; identify visual and sound symbols used by a filmmaker to suggest meaning; describe how lighting and music contribute to the emotional tone of a shot or scene.</p> <p>III: Students analyze how the use of light and shadow suggest meaning; distinguish between explicit and implicit information; interpret film elements in the composition of a single scene to derive meaning from the scene.</p>

2.0 Historical and Cultural Contexts

Content Standard	Outcomes by Level (I = Basic II = Intermediate III = Advanced)
2.1— Connecting film to history and culture	<p>I: Students identify the period in which a film is made and the period in which a film is set; explain the difference between history and culture; understand why a film is a cultural and not a historical document.</p> <p>II: Students distinguish between historical and cultural documents relative to a film's story, setting and theme; view and interpret cultural documents relative to a film's distribution, including a movie trailer and a movie review.</p> <p>III: Students analyze promotional techniques and materials for a film during the period in which the film was made; analyze critical reviews or public opinion about the film at the time it was released in theaters, comparing those viewpoints to present-day reviews.</p>
2.2— Identifying and interpreting film depictions	<p>I: Students explain what a film depiction is.</p> <p>II: Students interpret depictions of race, gender, and social class in a film and determine whether the depiction is positive, negative, or neutral.</p> <p>III: Students explain the techniques that filmmakers use to create depictions.</p>
2.3— Identifying and interpreting social issues and historical events as presented in film	<p>I: Students identify social issues or historical events presented in a film.</p> <p>II: Students describe how a film presents social issues or historical events.</p> <p>III: Students analyze social, political, economic, and other factors; make conclusions about how society influences and is influenced by film.</p>
2.4— Identifying characteristics of a film documentary	<p>I: Students describe the difference between a documentary film and a feature film.</p> <p>II: Students understand that a documentary is a representation of reality using moving images.</p> <p>III: Students research moving images for use in developing a topic for a documentary film.</p>

3.0 Production and Creative Expression

Content Standard

Outcomes by Level (I = Basic II = Intermediate III = Advanced)

<p>3.1— Understanding the filmmaking process</p>	<p>I: Students describe what happens in each of the three stages of making a film — pre-production, production, and post-production; understand what a screenplay is; explain what is meant by directing, screenwriting, production design, cinematography, acting, film editing, and music composition.</p> <p>II: Students describe the director's role in each stage of production.</p> <p>III: Students understand what is meant by the director's vision and the collaborative process.</p>
<p>3.2— Identifying creative and/or technical skills in the filmmaking process</p>	<p>I: Students identify the various professionals and craftspeople that collaborate to make a film.</p> <p>II: Students explain the tasks of the director, screenwriter, production designer, cinematographer, actors, film editor, and composer in making a film.</p> <p>III: Students understand how the various filmmaking roles work together to create a single film.</p>
<p>3.3— Analyzing a film's visual design</p>	<p>I: Students explain what is meant by a film's "look," or visual design and style.</p> <p>II: Students identify elements that contribute to a film's visual design, including set design and construction, props, location, costuming, and make-up; explain how lighting and editing contribute to the film's visual design.</p> <p>III: Students evaluate and comment on the choices made by the director, production designer, and cinematographer in creating a film's visual design.</p>

4.0 Viewers' Response and Aesthetic Valuing

Content Standard	Outcomes by Level (I = Basic II = Intermediate III = Advanced)
4.1— Understanding our film heritage	<p>I: Students explain what film preservation is; understand the purpose of the National Film Registry.</p> <p>II: Students distinguish between film preservation and film restoration; identify qualities that make a film eligible for the National Film Registry.</p> <p>III: Students evaluate and nominate films to the National Film Registry.</p>
4.2— Deriving personal meaning from film	<p>I: Students express an opinion about the film, using film language and supportive details and references to specific scenes or elements.</p> <p>II: Students understand that each person interprets and reacts emotionally and intellectually to a film in a different way.</p> <p>III: Students analyze how the film did or did not have personal relevance, citing specific examples from the film.</p>
4.3— Assessing the merits of film as a work of art	<p>I: Students explain characteristics that make a film a work of art.</p> <p>II: Students identify and explain qualities of the film that make it a success or a failure, given the filmmaker's intended theme and audience; create a step-by-step process for others to follow in critiquing a film.</p> <p>III: Students analyze how the film did or did not have personal relevance, citing specific examples from the film; understand the purpose and process of writing a film critique; write and present a film critique.</p>

5.0 Cross-Curricular Connections

Content Standard

Outcomes by Level (I = Basic II = Intermediate III = Advanced)

5.1— Understanding relationships between film and the other arts and disciplines outside the arts

- I: Students identify common terms in film study with other subject areas (e.g., characterization, symbolism, composition, depiction, etc.); use visuals to communicate ideas in other subject areas.
- II: Students apply knowledge of film content and narrative structure to writing personal narratives; apply knowledge of film depictions to analyzing political cartoons in social studies; use visual symbols and elements of composition to depict the history and cultures of other civilizations.
- III: Students communicate ideas for written and oral presentations using moving images or elements of film composition; work collaboratively with others in problem-solving projects; study a social issue and research archival film to create a multimedia presentation that reflects that time and culture.

5.2— Identifying professional filmmaking skills and roles

- I: Students identify filmmaking roles.
- II: Students identify the skills needed for various filmmaking roles, such as director, screenwriter, production designer, costume designer, cinematographer, actor, film editor, and composer.
- III: Students research two or more works of specific filmmakers and analyze how their training and experiences influenced their work.