

How to Nominate a Film to the National Registry

Overview

Of the more than 21,000 feature-length films produced in the United States before 1951, less than half exist today. Seventy-five percent of all silent films no longer exist. To safeguard the country's film heritage, the United States Congress passed the National Film Preservation Act in 1988. This law authorizes the Librarian of Congress to select up to 25 films each year for preservation. In this activity, students join the debate and nominate films of their choice to the National Film Registry. This activity provides an excellent real-world connection between your students and our country's national library.

Learning Outcomes

Students will

- understand that each person interprets a work of art, including film, in a different way;
- identify qualities that make a film eligible for the National Film Registry;
- understand the steps involved in the process of nominating a film for national preservation.

Key Terms

(Note: Most terms are defined within the activity text that follows. You may also refer to the glossary.)

archive, preservation, restoration

Materials

Student Group Activity Sheet: National Film Registry Nominations

Note: Although the curriculum does not provide specific films for screening in this activity, students may wish to screen films independently to review, evaluate, and consider them for nomination

Concept

The United States Congress formed the National Film Registry as a measure to safeguard the country's film heritage. Nominated films must have cultural, historical or aesthetic significance.

Engage

Explain the meaning of the word *archive* to students. An archive is a collection of documents, such as letters, photographs, or other recorded materials. Archives may focus solely on an individual. For example, a presidential archive would be the collection of documents relating to the president's life and/or term of office. Archives exist also for institutions, such as businesses or governments, as well as for special topics, such as women's history or whaling or art. The materials within an archive are protected or preserved so that future generations can read or view the materials and learn from them.

Expand discussion by asking students the following questions:

What is the purpose of an archive? Who might use archival materials? Emphasize two main ideas: Archival materials are noncurrent, dating from previous decades or even centuries; and archival materials are held primarily for their historical and cultural interest. People who use archives are usually researching the past.

Where might you find archives? Libraries, museums, historical societies, universities, art galleries, and hospitals are just some of the organizations that might house archival materials.

Finally, ask students to explain the purpose of a film archive. Specifically, encourage them to discuss why older or noncurrent films might be worth preserving for future generations. What might someone today learn about the past by viewing classic films?

Explain & Explore

- Write these three words on the chalkboard or overhead projector and discuss their meanings—*cultural*, *historical*, *aesthetic*.

Cultural encompasses the beliefs and values of a society, often expressed through its artwork, food, and clothing, but also through religion and education.

Historical refers to a society's past events.

Aesthetic is the quality of what a society finds beautiful or pleasing. Aesthetics refers to art and art appreciation.

- Explain what the National Film Registry is. It is an organization formed by the passing of a federal law, the 1988 National Film Preservation Act. Congress passed the law and formed the registry in order to safeguard and restore the country's film heritage. Each year the registry adds 25 films to its list (after reviewing public suggestions and consulting extensively with film experts and the 40 members and alternates of the National Film Preservation Board). The Library of Congress works to ensure that each film on the list is preserved for all time, either through the library's massive motion-picture preservation program or through collaborative ventures with other archives, motion-picture studios, and independent filmmakers.
- Ask students why organizations such as the Film Preservation Board and The Film Foundation don't just save *all* the films. Some students may rightly question who will pay for the cost of restoring so many films. Emphasize too that many films exist only as a single print and are owned privately. Such films do not belong to the general public.
- Distribute **Student Group Activity: National Film Registry Nominations**, which follows. Explain that students will work in groups to research and recommend 5 to 10 films to nominate for the National Film Registry. Review the Word Builder terms and the steps listed on the activity sheet, then allow students sufficient time in class to begin their discussions of the questions and the films they are considering. Much of this work will have to be completed outside of class, through Internet and library research. However, students should use class time to discuss their research strategies and how to divide the tasks listed on the sheet.

Close

Discuss with students their group selections. Consider submitting their nominations to the Film Preservation Board at the Library of Congress. For more information, students can access submission information at the National Film Registry's Web site, www.loc.gov/film/vote.html.

STUDENT GROUP ACTIVITY

National Film Registry Nominations

Directions: Your group will research, discuss, then select 5 to 10 films you believe have a place in the National Film Registry. Follow the steps below.

Step 1: Read the description below about the kind of films eligible to be considered for the National Film Registry.

The Librarian/ Board will continue to select up to 25 "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" films each year for the National Film Registry. To be eligible, films must be at least 10 years old, though they need not be feature-length or have had a theatrical release in order to be considered. The legislation's intent is that the broadest possible range of films be eligible for consideration.

Question: What are two qualifications for a film to be listed with the National Film Registry?

Word Builder

registry—a list or calendar of events

culturally—relating to a society's values and beliefs

historically—relating to a society's past events

aesthetically—relating to art or art appreciation

significant—important, noteworthy

Step 2: Read the quotation below from Dr. James Billington, the Librarian of Congress, about the films chosen for the registry.

The films we choose are not necessarily either the "best" American films ever made or the most famous. But they are films that continue to have cultural, historical, or aesthetic significance—and in many cases represent countless other films also deserving of recognition. The selection of a film, I stress, is not an endorsement of its ideology or content, but rather a recognition of the film's importance to American film and cultural history and to history in general.

Question: Of the films selected, what is most important—the quality of the film, the content of the film, or the film's importance as a historical and cultural document?

Step 3: Delegate one or two members of your group to each research a different decade. Be sure that every member of the group has a "decade" assignment. For each film you wish your group to consider, complete an index card with this information on it:

- Title of film
- Year made
- Director
- Synopsis of story
- Reasons why this film is culturally, historically, or aesthetically (artistically) significant

Step 4: The group members will begin their research, then report back to the group. Movie listings are available through numerous library references. In addition, the Web sites below will provide some good starting points for learning about films that are "culturally, historically or aesthetically significant." Log on to the National Film Registry Web site to see if a film you are researching has already been named to the registry.

National Film Preservation Board

National Film Registry

American Museum of the Moving Image

Internet Movie Database

www.locweb.loc.gov/film/

www.loc.gov/film/filmnfr.html

www.ammi.org/site/

www.imdb.com

Step 5: As a group, discuss the films you have researched. Based on the criteria established by the Library of Congress, select 5 to 10 films. For each film you nominate, write a single paragraph describing the film, using the information on your index card. Once you have completed your project, consider sending your nominations to the Library of Congress for review.