
TYPE ACTIVITY SHEET: FILM

Overview:

Film covers a wide range of visual artifacts, from creative works of fiction, to interviews and documentaries, to the unobtrusive recording of events as they occur. The visual medium is invaluable because it enables those who study the past to witness some version of it. Understanding film, however, requires a healthy dose of skepticism, in order to ascertain the accuracy of what we see.

Yet film does not need to be “accurate” to be of value to the historian. Even highly fictionalized accounts can provide useful insight into the mentality of the time. What did the filmmaker--whether he or she was creating a work of art, a documentary, or a personal record--want the viewer to see? Why? Information about setting, time, and context affects our understanding of film.

Analysis of women’s roles both in front of and behind the camera greatly enhances our understanding of the past. As actors, what direction did they receive? How were they depicted and what control did they have over their portrayal? What transpired before they could gain the control that comes with being behind the camera? How did they use this medium to reveal what was important to them?

Skill Focus:

Interpret images
Distinguish between fact and fiction
Identify visual details

For the Teacher:

1. Show the class a film clip of a contemporary event and discuss the nature and value of film as an historical source. Identify different types of film, such as documentaries, live recordings, fiction, home movies, etc.
2. Have students watch part of a film at home.
3. Have students complete Section 1 of the Student Activity Sheet at home and discuss their results in class.
4. Show students a film clip from the Jewish Women’s Archive collection.
5. Have students complete Section 2 of the Student Activity Sheet and discuss their observations.
6. Provide students with background information for this film clip and have them complete Section 3 of the Student Activity Sheet.
7. For more specific questions, look at *Discuss This Document* in the individual documents.
8. Discuss students’ responses.
9. If time permits, have students do the follow-up activities in Section 4 of the Student Activity Sheet.

Document List:

Yiddle mitn Fiddle, 1936
Interview about racial discrimination, 2001