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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2006 Volume I: Stories around the World in Film

Back to the Future: How Earlier Art Forms Have Influenced Contemporary Cinema in Ireland, Iran, and Africa

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This unit started with the idea of teaching students about different cultures through cinema, but in the process of refining my topic, I came to realize I could also teach my students to understand a particular region's cinema through its culture. This symbiosis was a revelation to me, and I hope students will delight in it as much as I have. Students can learn from the movies a great deal about a nation's or region's history, geography, and people, including their values, hopes, and fears, but to understand the way filmmakers express these through cinema, it helps to know something beforehand of the culture from which these movies spring. In analyzing the cinema of Ireland, Iran, and Africa, students will uncover the artistic and cultural traditions out of which movies from each of these regions arise. This process of discovery should help students better appreciate the films. Students may be surprised to learn that the novel or short story is not necessarily the starting point from which all cinemas have grown. Arguably, poetry, visual arts, and oral tales have had, in many cases, an even greater influence on non-Hollywood films. This unit offers teachers an array of works in these other genres to use as vehicles to help students understand and enjoy the international films they will see. It is written with ninth grade students in mind, but can be adapted for students in grades 8 through 12.

(Developed for Language Arts, grade 9, and World History and Language, grade 12; recommended for English Literature and Language Arts, grade 9)

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