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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2007 Volume I: Adapting Literature

Political Socialization: Finding Ourselves in Film

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by Jeff Joyce

This unit deals with films, among other major media types, and the sway they might have on one's political ideals. More pointedly, the unit asks that my Advanced Placement American Government students remember and research their own histories to determine the political pressures that have been exerted on them over the course of many years. Indeed, I want them to think about how they have had to adapt to their political climate given the media barrage that has been a near constant in their lives and then how the media has had an effect on their political thoughts and feelings.

The process is referred to as political socialization, or the ways that people become their political selves. Most often political scientists give primary weight in this matter to family. But as times have changed and children expose themselves to, and are often manipulated by, multiple forms of media, it is worth asking whether or not their political opinions are in many ways a byproduct of the materials they consume. Therefore, this unit emphasizes the role that film has played in my students' political development.

This unit includes the study of political ideologies first and then uses film analysis to find political rhetoric in popular media. The unit then poses the question to students: have the films you have digested changed you, politically? The overarching goal is to have students learn not only to appropriately define general political ideologies in context, but to apply their understanding to their own lives and then, through some self-discovery, pinpoint the origins of their own political belief system.

(Developed for AP Government and Politics, grade 12; recommended for AP Government and Politics, grade 12)

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