

Historical Fiction Analysis Project

HIST 2111 - Feagin

Fall 2012

*"Where I come from, we believe all sorts of things that aren't true.
We call it history."*

Wicked (musical)

Project Description

This project requires you to examine how popular versions of history (film, novels, plays) operate as interpretations of history. You will be analyzing your chosen work to explain how this work offers us a specific interpretation of history and how, in the process, it tells us more about the world that produced it than the world it describes.

There will be three smaller assignments leading up to one large research project, which, taken together, comprise 30 % of your final grade.

The final product will be a 4-5 page paper (1000-1300 words) analyzing the historical interpretation offered by a piece of popular fiction.

You may choose any work (film, novel, or play) you would like, but it must fall within the scope of the course (American history to 1877). You will have your choice approved before moving on to the research part of the project.

The project will be broken down into its constituent steps, each due on a different day.



Due Dates

8/29	Historical Fiction Choice
10/3	Film Summary, Bibliography, & Analysis Worksheet
11/12	Analytical Paper
11/26-11/28	Final Presentations

Step One - Historical Fiction Choice

For this part of the assignment, you need to bring in your choice of historical fiction—film, book, or play—for approval in class. The topic must fall within the scope of the course.

Step Two - Research

For this part of the assignment, you will watch or read your choice of historical fiction. On the due date, you will provide a 1-2 page summary of the film, a completed analysis worksheet (available on VISTA), and a research bibliography.

You must identify **8 scholarly sources** (at least two books) that pertain to your topic. Scholarly sources include book published by an academic press (Oxford University Press, University of Georgia Press, etc) or peer-reviewed articles (J-STOR is your best source for such articles).

Arrange them in bibliographic form, following the Chicago Manual of Style.

A useful resource for the Chicago Manual of Style can be found here:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/717/01/>

Step Three - Analysis

This 4-5 page paper should NOT be a summary of the work in question, but rather a critical analysis of the historical interpretation offered by the film. It must be typed and double spaced, in 12- point Times New Roman font, with 1-inch margins and bibliography in Chicago style.

The bibliography must include at least 4 of the sources identified in the previous step (at least one book).

Step Four - Presentation

Each student will deliver a 5-minute presentation, with visual aid, on the interpretation of history offered by your historical work of choice. The order will be determined by the instructor, though you may request a particular day up to a week in advance.

You must attend both presentation days, even if you present on the first day, or your presentation grade will be reduced by 50%.

Historical Fiction Analysis Worksheet

Answering the following questions about your historical fiction will help you begin thinking critically about your analytical paper. It must be turned in with your bibliography and film summary.

Due:

- I. Background**
 - a. What is the intended audience for this fictional work?
 - b. What historical subject matter does this fictional work depict?
 - c. Who made this fictional work? Summarize his or her biography.
- II. Characterization**
 - a. Who are the main characters? What are they like?
 - b. How do they seem to feel about the historical event(s) in question?
- III. Plot**
 - a. Describe the plot of the fictional work. Are there any pivotal scenes?
 - b. Why are those scenes so important? Do they contribute to the larger theme or message of the work?
- IV. Themes**
 - a. What themes do you see in the fictional work?
 - b. How do the themes tell us about the values of the creator and/or the audience?
- V. Historical Accuracy**
 - a. Are there any historical inaccuracies in this fictional work?
 - b. How do those inaccuracies influence your understanding of the historical event(s) in question?
- VI. Summary**
 - a. How do you think the creator feels about the historical topic he or she is portraying?
 - b. What interpretation does he or she offer?

Grading Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Thesis in argument form (X factors lead to Y outcomes, i.e. cause-and-effect)	Paper has a clear thesis, in argument form, that is specific about the points addressed in the paper	Paper has a clear thesis, in argument form, but is not specific about the points addressed in the paper.	Thesis is too vague to clearly describe the argument (or no argument is being made)	Paper attempts a thesis, but it is not in argument form or is more descriptive than analytical
Evidence	Paper uses multiple pieces of evidence (from film and outside research about the film/director) to support key points	Paper uses some evidence (at least 2 pieces per key point), but that evidence comes from only one source (e.g. the film itself)	Paper uses little evidence (no more than 1 piece per key point), and that evidence comes from only one source (e.g. the film)	No evidence is used
Organization	Paper has a clear introduction, thesis, body, and conclusion to the paper. The introduction has a clear thesis. Each body paragraph has an identifiable topic sentence. There is evidence in each paragraph that supports the topic sentence. Body paragraphs collectively work to support the thesis, and the conclusion effectively summarizes the work	Paper attempts to organize the paper (with elements such as an introduction with thesis, body paragraphs with topic sentences and evidence, and a conclusion with summary) in a way that guide a reader through the argument, but demonstrates some difficulties with coherence or transitions between elements.	Paper attempts to organize the paper (with elements such as an introduction with thesis, body paragraphs with topic sentences and evidence, and a conclusion with summary) in a way that guide a reader through the argument, but demonstrates serious difficulties with some or all of these elements.	Paper lacks that clear organizational structures, (such as an introduction with thesis, body paragraphs with topic sentences and evidence, and a conclusion with summary) that guide a reader through the argument
Clarity & Style	All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. No words are misused. Technical terms, words from other languages, and words from other historical periods are explained. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread (ideally by you and somebody else), and contains no errors.	All sentences are grammatically correct and clearly written. An occasional word is misused. Technical terms, words from other languages, and words from other historical periods are usually, but not always, explained. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread, and contains no more than a few minor errors, which do not adversely affect the reader's ability to understand the essay.	A few sentences are grammatically incorrect or not clearly written. Several words are misused. Technical terms, words from other languages, and words from other historical periods are rarely explained. Paper has been spell-checked AND proofread, but still contains several errors. Reader's ability to understand essay may be compromised by these errors	Paper is full of grammatical errors and bad writing. Several words are misused. Technical terms, words from other languages, and words from other historical periods are rarely explained. Paper has not been spell-checked or proofread, and contains numerous errors. Reader has a difficult time understanding essay because of errors.
Overall	Author directly addresses main question or issue, and adds new insight to the subject. He or she clearly understands the interpretation of history being made by the creator, and can explain what this tells us about the filmmaker and his or her audience.	Author competently addresses main question or issue, but does not add much new insight into the subject. He or she seems to understand the interpretation of history being offered in the film, but does not demonstrate a broader understanding of what that interpretation tells us about the creator and his/her audience.	Author attempts to address main question or issue, but fails. There are serious gaps in knowledge or research, the interpretation of history is misconstrued, and/or the evidence is misused. Little to no understanding of context is demonstrated.	Essay does NOT address main question or issue, and it is obvious that author has not not effectively analyzed the film. It does not adequately identify or analyze the film's interpretation of history, nor does it attempt any research on the broader historical topic at hand. Such a paper is, at best, a summary, instead of a critical film review

Helpful Hints

- Choose a **topic** that interests you. There are hundreds of options available to you, so don't just pick the first one you read about. Giving yourself time to choose something that *you* are interested in because doing so will make the project much more interesting.
- The **library** is a fantastic resource for help with your research. The GHC library has created an assignment guide for this project that will help you as you move through the stages of this assignment. But please don't hesitate to ask for help from the librarians if you need further explanation or assistance.
- Scholarly sources are **peer-reviewed sources**. That means that experts in the field have read the book or article in question and have deemed it worthy. When you use books, look for university presses (Harvard University Press, University of Rochester Press, etc). When you look for articles, especially on GALILEO, be sure that you have checked the "peer-reviewed" and "full text" boxes. JSTOR contains *only* peer-reviewed articles.
- Be very careful with your use of **Chicago Manual of Style (CMS)**. Learning to cite **correctly** is important because it protects against plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Proper citations ensure fair play in the world of ideas and, as a result, I will place a great deal of importance on correct citations. In your paper, this means that you will have a cover sheet, footnotes or endnotes, and a bibliography in CMS format.
- **Proofread, proofread, proofread.** And then have someone else proofread for you. Careful attention to detail is as important in your writing as it is in your career. I will grade based on content *and* style, so give yourself time to go through multiple drafts of your paper.