

Live by the Sword, Die by the Gun: Thematic Commonality and Divergence in Japanese and American Cinema

A Directed Study Proposal
Spring 2022

teacher: Ned Gallagher

This directed study will introduce the field of cinema studies while exploring the mythologies of **samurai** and **Western** genres on celluloid. Unpacking the work of iconic directors such as Akira Kurosawa and John Ford, a rigorous viewing schedule of 15 films over the course of ten weeks in the spring term will be supplemented by textual material, discussion sessions, and regular writing assignments.

The term will begin with readings to introduce key concepts in film studies—terminology and techniques—as well as prevalent critical approaches used in studying cinema.

Films generally will be screened twice a week. (Most are available via streaming on Kanopy, available to all members of the Choate community via the Andrew Mellon Library.)

Discussions (which might be arranged outside the class day if no common open block can be identified) will consider technical and thematic elements of each week's films.

During the spring each student will compile a portfolio of five 2–3 page critical reviews with reference to film terminology and techniques, and to the themes of the course, with each essay focusing on a particular film or on a thematically linked pair of films (e.g., *Seven Samurai* and *The Magnificent Seven*, or *Yojimbo* and *A Fistful of Dollars*). There will be seven such opportunities to write, so each student can choose which two weeks to skip an essay.

For a final project, each student will identify a film of his/her choice to screen, write about, and present to the group, placing it in the context of themes and approaches identified throughout the term.

Preliminary Syllabus Draft

Week One: 21 March
Introduction to Film Studies

readings TBD

Week Two: 18 March
The Language of Cinema

screening: *Rashomon* (d. Akira Kurosawa, 1950, 88 min.)
screening: *Stagecoach* (d. John Ford, 1939, 96 min.)
associated reading material
optional bonus screening: *High Noon* (d. Fred Zinneman, 1952, 85 min.)

Week Three: 4 April
The Genres: The Western and *Jidaigeki* (時代劇)

screening: *The Searchers* (d. John Ford, 1956, 119 min.)
screening: *Harakiri* (d. Masaki Kobayashi, 1962, 134 min.)
associated reading material
optional bonus screening: *Shane* (d. George Stevens, 1953, 118 min.)

Week Four: 11 April
The Homage

screening: *Seven Samurai* (d. Akira Kurosawa, 1954, 207 min.)
screening: *The Magnificent Seven* (d. John Sturges, 1960, 126 min.) associated reading material

Week Five: 18 April (Long Weekend)
The Revisionist Western

screening: *Unforgiven* (d. Clint Eastwood, 1992, 131 min.)
associated reading material

Week Six: 25 April
The Remake

screening: *Yojimbo* (d. Akira Kurosawa, 1961, 110 min.)
screening: *A Fistful of Dollars* (d. Sergio Leone, 1964, 99 min.)
associated reading material

Week Seven: 2 May
1962: A Pair of Snapshots

screening: *Sanjuro* (d. Akira Kurosawa, 1962, 95 min.)
screening: *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance* (d. John Ford, 1962, 123 min.)
associated reading material
optional bonus screening: *For A Few Dollars More* (d. Sergio Leone, 1965, 132 min.)

Week Eight: 9 May
Variations

screening: *The Wild Bunch* (d. Sam Peckinpah, 1969, 145 min.)
screening: *Lone Wolf and Cub: Sword of Vengeance* (d. Kenji Misumi, 1972, 87 min.)
associated reading material
optional bonus screening: *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* (d. Sergio Leone, 1966, 177 min.)

Week Nine: 16 May
Paving the Way to the Modern Blockbuster Era

screening: *The Hidden Fortress* (d. Akira Kurosawa, 1958, 139 min.)
screening: *Star Wars* (d. George Lucas, 1977, 121 min.)
associated reading material

Week Ten: 23 May
Final Projects Due

Possible Subjects for Final Projects

3:10 to Yuma (d. Delmer Daves, 1957, 92 min.) and *3:10 to Yuma* (d. James Mangold, 2007, 122 min.)
True Grit (d. Henry Hathaway, 1969, 128 min.) and *True Grit* (d. Joel & Ethan Coen, 2010, 110 min.)
Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (d. George Roy Hill, 1969, 110 min.)
Dances With Wolves (d. Kevin Costner, 1990, 181 min.)
The Quick and the Dead (d. Sam Raimi, 1995, 108 min.)
Kill Bill, Volumes 1 and 2 (d. Quentin Tarantino, 2003/2004, 111/137 min.)
The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada (d. Tommy Lee Jones, 2005, 121 min.)
Brokeback Mountain (d. Ang Lee, 2005, 134 min.)
No Country For Old Men (d. Joel & Ethan Coen, 2007, 122 min.)
The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford (d. Andrew Dominik, 2007, 160 min.) *Django*
Unchained (d. Quentin Tarantino, 2012, 165 min.)
The Homesman (d. Tommy Lee Jones, 2014, 123 min.)
Logan (d. James Mangold, 2017, 137 min.)
season 1 of *The Mandalorian* (Disney+, 2019, 8 episodes)