

Economics in the Movies

Overview

Economics relies heavily on abstract concepts and mathematical analysis, which many students find particularly difficult to master. As a result, students are often intimidated rather than stimulated by learning economics. The use of films to supplement economics material helps to alleviate this issue. In this activity, students will review major economic topics by applying the principles to a popular movie or television show of their choice.

Grade

10

NC Essential Standards for American History: the Founding Principles, Civics & Economics

Specific objectives will depend on student's movie choice. Broad curricular goals for lesson include:

- FP.E.1.1- Compare how individuals and governments utilize scarce resources (human, natural and capital) in traditional, command, market and mixed economies.
- FP.E.1.4- Analyze the ways in which incentives and profits influence what is produced and distributed in a market system.
- FP.E.3.3- Analyze organizations in terms of their roles and functions in the United States economy.

Essential Questions

- How does scarcity affect the decisions of individuals, businesses, and the government?
- How do individuals weigh trade-offs and opportunity cost when making economic decisions?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages to consumers when the government intervenes in the economy?
- Why is the private ownership of resources a vital part of the free enterprise system?
- What roles do security and freedom play in the free enterprise system?
- How does the government protect individual initiative and what are the advantages and disadvantages of these protections?

Materials

- Movie Proposal Form, attached
- Essay Prompt, attached
- Grading Rubric, attached

Procedure

1. As a warm-up, on the board project the quote by economist Alfred Marshall, "Economics is a study of men as they live and move and think in the ordinary business of life." Ask the students what they think the quote means. How does the quote relate to the economic principles that have been covered in class so far? In what other ways do humans study and portray everyday life in less academic venues? Lead the students to consider how movies and television are also a portrayal of the business of life. Tell the students that movies often involve economic decisions and themes central to the plot.
2. Inform the students for this essay assignment they will first select a movie that demonstrates one or more important economic principles they have covered during the course. If they are unable to come up with a film, they can write the essay based on at least two episodes of a television drama with teacher approval. The students should consider the following questions when choosing and reviewing their film. If the student answers most or all of the following questions with a no, another movie may be necessary.
 - Are there economic principles covered in the film?

- Are the characters' decisions shaped by economic concepts?
 - Do scarcity, trade-offs, and opportunity cost affect characters' decisions?
 - Did characters utilize cost-benefit analyses when making decisions?
 - Are there incentives presented to the main characters presented?
3. Have the students brainstorm possible movies. Write the ideas on the board. Popular movies with economic principles and themes may include:
- Charlie and the Chocolate Factory
 - Monster, Inc.
 - A Bug's Life
 - You've Got Mail
 - Trading Places
 - It's a Wonderful Life
 - The Pursuit of Happyness
 - Erin Brockovich
 - A Civil Action
 - Forrest Gump
 - Gone with the Wind
 - Cast Away
 - The Hudsucker Proxy
 - Tucker: The Man and His Dream
4. Pass out the Movie Proposal Form. Inform students that they should use this list as a starting point to choose a movie to watch outside of class. The proposal form must be completed and returned to the teacher before the essay assignment can be completed. Also review and abide by any county or school policies regarding films. Either during the same period or after collecting the proposal form, pass out the essay prompt and grading rubric. The assignment can be completed entirely outside of class or class time can be used for a writing workshop during which students plan and draft their essays, critique one another's essays, etc.

Differentiation

Students with special needs

- Have a writing workshop to assist students. Require students to bring in a plot summary and rough outline for their essay and share in small groups.

AIG

- Have students expand their essays into a presentation that they share with class, teaching about their film and the economic concepts illustrated

Name: _____

Economics in Motion Pictures: Movie Proposal Form

Use www.imdb.com or another internet resource to complete the following:

Movie Title: _____

MPAA Rating: _____

Brief Plot Summary:

Economic Principles Covered: _____

Parent/ Guardian Consent

After reading the Economics in Motion Pictures Essay Prompt and reviewing above information, I _____ approve of my child's viewing of the above film rated G/PG/PG-13 (circle one).

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Contact Information

Relationship to Student: _____

Email: _____

Daytime Phone #: _____

Evening Phone #: _____

Economics in Motion Pictures: Essay Prompt

After completing the Movie Proposal Form and watching your selection, respond to the following prompt in essay format:

Movies are filled with action, mystery, romance and—would you believe?—economics. Economics is often described as the science of decision making. Use the basic principles of economics to analyze the decisions and events in the movie of your choice. Use the following questions to guide your analysis:

- What principles of economics were covered in the film?
- How does scarcity, trade-offs, and opportunity cost affect characters' decisions?
- Did characters utilize cost-benefit analyses when making decisions? If not, how would the outcome of events have been different?
- What incentives are the main characters presented with? How do they react to these incentives?
- Are individuals and businesses allowed to compete freely based on self-interest in the film?
- What role did the government play in the economic lives of the characters? How can you tell?
- How would the movie have been different if the main characters were trained economists?
- Does the film illustrate a truth about economics?
- Does the film contain false or overly simplistic economic themes?

As you write your essay, remember to:

- Clearly state and support your opinion.
- Consider the purpose, audience, and context of your essay.
- Organize your essay so that your ideas progress logically.
- Include relevant details that clearly develop your essay.
- Edit your essay for standard grammar and language usage.
- Review the Grading Rubric

Economics in Motion Pictures: Grading Rubric

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Movie Proposal Form	Student returned completed movie proposal form on the date it was due.	Student returned completed movie proposal form 1 day late.	Student returned completed movie proposal form 2 days late.	Student returned completed movie proposal form more than 2 days late.
Focus	Maintains focus on topic/subject throughout response.	May exhibit minor lapses in focus on topic/subject.	May lose or may exhibit major lapses in focus on topic/subject.	May fail to establish focus on topic/subject.
Organization	Organization is a logical progression of ideas/events and is unified and complete.	There is a logical progression of ideas/events and is reasonably complete, although minor lapses may be present.	One or more major lapses in the logical progression of ideas/events is evident.	Ideas/events are presented in a random fashion
Support	Support consists of specific, developed details from film and material covered in class.	Support consists of some specific details from film and material covered in class.	Support consists of general and/or undeveloped details, which may be presented in a list-like fashion.	Support is sparse; almost no details from film and material covered in class.
Comprehension	Exhibits skillful use of economic vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.	Exhibits reasonable use of economic vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.	Exhibits minimal use of economic vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.	Lacks use of economic vocabulary that is precise and purposeful.
Creativity and Critical Analysis	Essay shows high level critical analysis and reflection leading to many original propositions.	Essay shows a moderate level critical analysis and reflection leading to some original propositions.	Essay shows a low level critical analysis and reflection leading to few original propositions.	Essay shows no critical analysis and reflection leading to no original propositions.
Mechanics	No grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors.	Almost no grammatical, spelling or punctuation errors	A few grammatical spelling, or punctuation errors.	Many grammatical, spelling, or punctuation errors.
Sources	Sources are accurately documented in MLA format. At least one source for movie.	Sources are documented, but not in MLA format. At least one source for movie.	Sources are present, but no format whatsoever. At least one source for movie.	Sources are not present.