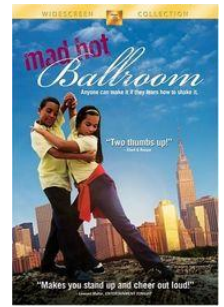


## Mad Hot Ballroom (2005) – Directed by Marilyn Agrelo

Every year, the New York Public School system sponsors a dance competition for youngsters in fifth grade; in this contest, boys and girls ages 10 and 11 learn traditional ballroom dancing styles such as the fox trot, the rumba, and the tango, and then pit their skills against other students from around the Big Apple. Mad Hot Ballroom is a documentary which offers an inside look at this event, as well as the teachers and students who take part.



### Questions for discussion groups

- What was it about learning to dance that made the children interested in taking part in these classes?
- Great dancing requires great discipline.
  - Examine how the teachers and the team members encouraged everyone's responsibility and discipline in learning this new skill.
  - How did the children react to these demands and in what ways did it change their understanding of commitment?
- How valuable is this understanding of commitment to the development of a young person's future growth, vision of a career and commitment to relationships?
- Does the film help us look beyond the competitive side of the event? Are we more concerned with the children's commitment to learning something culturally enriching or are we just concerned with them winning the competition?
- The children were determined to give the competition the best at all times. How does the determination of the children encourage us to change by learning new experiences in our own lives?

## Children of Heaven (1997) - Directed by Bacheha-Ye aseman

The Children of Heaven follows the relationship between an impoverished brother and sister, Ali and Zahra, who are thrust into a difficult circumstance. They choose to solve their problem themselves, without telling their parents, in their own unique way. What follows is a tender, moving tale of compassion, determination and deep family love.

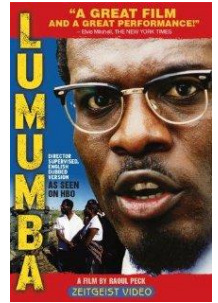


### Questions for discussion groups

- Think about the film's ending. How did it make you feel and were you satisfied with this conclusion?
- Discuss the symbolism of the shoes in this film as a way of reflecting the values of family, gender and education?
- Examine a few of the ways this film tells us to be careful about our judgments on other people.
- Outline some of the choices Ali makes and consider whether he remains loyal to his sister and parents through these decisions.
- Consider the effect of Ali's determination on his own personal growth and development. What does Ali come to learn in the course of the film?
- Give your own conclusion to the film

## Lumumba (2000) - Directed by Raoul Peck

The true story of the rise to power and brutal assassination of the formerly vilified and later redeemed leader of the independent Congo, Patrice Lumumba. Using newly discovered historical evidence, Haitian-born and later Congo-raised writer and director Raoul Peck renders an emotional and tautly woven account of the mail clerk and beer salesman with a flair for oratory and an uncompromising belief in the capacity of his homeland to build a prosperous nation independent of its former Belgium overlords.

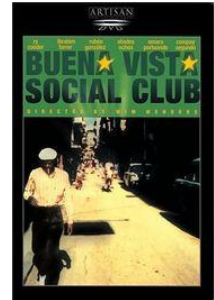


### Questions for study groups

- Describe Lumumba's character. What was he like as a leader?
- What compromises should a person make in order to govern well and what should they never be compromised?
- Human resilience can soar to extremes when moved for a cause in search of truth and justice. Discuss Lumumba's fight for freedom as described in relation to the movie.
- You can kill the messenger but not the message. Is this reflected in the movie?
- Analyze the support given in this film to colonial Congo by foreign countries. Suggest one way of giving suitable support to a situation within the world.

## **Buena Vista Social Club (1999) - Directed by Wim Wenders**

Aging Cuban musicians whose talents had been virtually forgotten following Castro's takeover of Cuba, are brought out of retirement by Ry Cooder, who travelled to Havana in order to bring the musicians together, resulting in triumphant performances of extraordinary music, and resurrecting the musicians' careers.

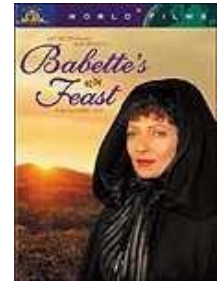


### **Questions for discussion groups**

- Identify two musicians in the film that stood out to you.
- What elements of Cuban culture were displayed in the film?
- Discuss the role of this music for Cuban society.
- Examine the way music speak for itself in this film.
- Did the musicians appear fulfilled in their art? Name one example.
- Evaluate art and its importance in fulfilling the aspirations of these artists. Relate this to your own experience and consider the things that help fulfill your own aspirations.

## Babette's Feast (1987) – Directed by Gabriel Axel

Babette, a 19th century Parisian political refugee seeks shelter in a rough Danish coastal town. Philippa and Martina, the elderly daughters of the town's long-dead minister, take Babette in. As revealed in flashback, Philippa and Martina were once beautiful young women, who'd forsaken their chances at romance and fame, taking hollow refuge in religion. Babette holds a secret that may very well allow the older ladies to have a second chance at life.



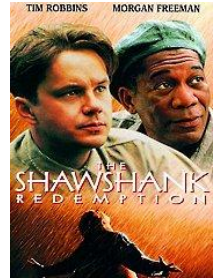
### Questions for discussion groups

- Picture Babette in the kitchen preparing the feast. Describe the way the director presents Babette at this stage in the film.
- Identify the choices Philippa, Martine and General Lorens Loewenhielm, make early on in the film, in respect to their state of life.
- Why do these characters exhibit a fear about the choices they have made in life?
- Examine the role of freedom in Phillipa's decision not to become a professional singer. Consider her living environment and beliefs in this examination.
- Does the size of the village matter? Does the smallness, poorness, and ungentrified nature of the village audience affect Babette's art?
- How does the feast help alleviate the fears and judgments the community have formed during their lives? What does this tell us about the role of people from outside the community?
- How does Babette's love for cooking transmit itself onto the community?
- "Poor? No, I shall never be poor. I told you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing" (Babette). Think about how Babette has transformed herself through this self-gift. How should we consider our treatment of self-giving within our own lives?



## The Shawshank Redemption (1994) – Directed by Frank Darabont

In 1946, a banker named Andy Dufresne is convicted of a double murder, even though he stubbornly proclaims his innocence. He's sentenced to a life term at the Shawshank State Prison in Maine, where another lifer, Ellis "Red" Redding, picks him as the new recruit most likely to crack under the pressure. The ugly realities of prison life are quickly introduced to Andy: a corrupt warden, sadistic guards led by Capt. Byron Hadley, and inmates who are little better than animals, willing to use rape or beatings to insure their dominance. But Andy does not crack: he has the hope of the truly innocent, which (together with his smarts) allow him to prevail behind bars. He uses his banking skills to win favor with the warden and the guards, in exchange, he is able to improve the prison library and bring some dignity and respect back to many of the inmates, including Red.

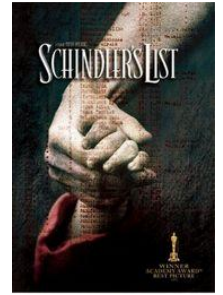


### Questions for discussion groups

- Recall four moments in the film where the characters were able to express their freedom. What does this tell us about the nature of freedom, hope and redemption?
- Is a person inevitably sensitive to humanity regardless of his or her individual situation?
- Andy and Red discuss the meaning of hope. Red then gets up and walks away. Why do you think he does this?
- Give one example from your own life where hope has fuelled your courage in face of difficulties.
- Compare and contrast the experience of Brooks from the experience of Red, following their release. How does Red's friendship with Andy inform his decision-making?

## Schindler's List (1993) – Directed by Stephen Spielberg

Based on a true story, Oskar Schindler, a German businessman in Poland sees an opportunity to make money from the Nazis' rise to power. He starts a company to make cookware and utensils, using flattery and bribes to win military contracts, and brings in accountant and financier Itzhak Stern to help run the factory. By staffing his plant with Jews who've been herded into Krakow's ghetto by Nazi troops, Schindler has a dependable unpaid labor force. For Stern, a job in a war-related plant could mean survival for himself and the other Jews working for Schindler. However, in 1942, all of Krakow's Jews are assigned to the Plaszow Forced Labor Camp, overseen by Commandant Amon Goeth, an embittered alcoholic who occasionally shoots prisoners from his balcony. Schindler arranges to continue using Polish Jews in his plant, but, as he sees what is happening to his employees, he begins to develop a conscience. He realizes that his factory (now refitted to manufacture ammunition) is the only thing preventing his staff from being shipped to the death camps. Soon Schindler demands more workers and starts bribing Nazi leaders to keep Jews on his employee lists and out of the camps. By the time Germany falls to the allies, Schindler has lost his entire fortune -- and saved 1,100 people from likely death.



### Questions for discussion groups

- Discuss the use of color in this film. Why do you think Spielberg incorporated color in this way and what does it tell us about Schindler's view of the human person?
- Is a person inevitably sensitive to humanity regardless of his or her individual situation?
- What ethical questions are raised concerning the worth of the person within a life or death situation?
- Outline the important historical lessons we learn from this film. Are these lessons applicable in the world today?
- How does Schindler change throughout the film and what makes him change? What does the film's conclusion convey about the value of human life?

## Hero (2004) – Directed by Yimou Zhang

In a distant war torn land, a ruthless emperor is rising to power with an iron fist and massive armies. To control everything, he will stop at nothing. A fearless warrior, Nameless, goes on a mission of revenge, against the emperor, for the massacre of his people.



### Questions for discussion groups

- Identify what each color symbolizes? How do transitions between the colors bring unity to the film's story? 2. What traits are necessary for true heroism?
- How does director Yimou Zhang compose the film's cinematography to help the viewer contemplate the meaning of sacrifice?
- Does the film finish with a clear message? If so what is the message?
- What is the role of human suffering and sacrifice in building a just world?
- How should cultural clashes be resolved? Use the answers to question 5 in this examination.

## QUESTIONS

### Mad Hot Ballroom

Directed by Marilyn Agrelo (2005)

*"It's more than learning steps ... It's etiquette ... It's life." Louise Verdemare*

1. What was it about learning to dance that made the children interested in taking part in these classes?
2. Great dancing requires great discipline.
  - a. Examine how the teachers and the team members encouraged everyone's responsibility and discipline in learning this new skill.
  - b. How did the children react to these demands and in what ways did it change their understanding of commitment?
3. How valuable is this understanding of commitment to the development of a young person's future growth, vision of a career and commitment to relationships?
4. Does the film help us look beyond the competitive side of the event? Are we more concerned with the children's commitment to learning something culturally enriching or are we just concerned with them winning the competition?
5. The children were determined to give the competition the best at all times. How does the determination of the children encourage us to change by learning new experiences in our own lives?

### Les Choristes

Directed by Christophe Barratier (2004)

*"This idea of someone who passes the flame to the next generation is a very moving one to me. And, of course, it also begs the question of what is the true meaning of success?" Gerard Jugnot (Clement Mathieu)*

1. Try to recall the effect of music in this film. Give one example of why you feel music is important to the film's story?
2. We see two systems used to discipline and educate the pupils. 1) The strict autocratic approach of headmaster, Monsieur Rachin. 2) Mathieu's humanistic approach of focusing on the boy's hidden singing talent. Identify three reasons why Mathieu's approach is more successful than Rachin's.
3. Name three other factors besides music that contribute to the education and transformation of the pupils.
4. Mathieu teaches the pupils how to be disciplined in music. How does this discipline affect their interaction with each other?
5. Mathieu does not achieve the fame he wishes for through his musical excellence. Should we consider him a failure? Does he consider himself a failure? Discuss.

6. Outline the overall effect of the film's message concerning the way we should apply our talents in everyday life.

### **Babette's Feast**

Directed by Gabriel Axel (1987)

*"You must prove to me that the choice I made was the right one." General Lorens Loewenhielm*

1. Picture Babette in the kitchen preparing the feast. Describe the way the director presents Babette at this stage in the film.
2. Identify the choices Philippa, Martine and General Lorens Loewenhielm, make early on in the film, in respect to their state of life.
3. Why do these characters exhibit a fear about the choices they have made in life?
4. Examine the role of freedom in Philippa's decision not to become a professional singer. Consider her living environment and beliefs in this examination.
5. Does the size of the village matter? Does the smallness, poorness, and ungentrified nature of the village audience affect Babette's art?
6. How does the feast help alleviate the fears and judgments the community have formed during their lives? What does this tell us about the role of people from *outside* the community?
7. How does Babette's love for cooking transmit itself onto the community?
8. "Poor? No, I shall never be poor. I told you that I am a great artist. A great artist, Mesdames, is never poor. We have something, Mesdames, of which other people know nothing" (Babette). Think about how Babette has transformed herself through this self-gift. How should we consider our treatment of self-giving within our own lives?

### **Children of Heaven**

Directed by Majid Majidi (1997)

1. Think about the film's ending. How did it make you feel and were you satisfied with this conclusion?
2. Discuss the symbolism of the shoes in this film as a way of reflecting the values of family, gender and education?
3. Examine a few of the ways this film tells us to be careful about our judgments on other people.
4. Outline some of the choices Ali makes and consider whether he remains loyal to his sister and parents through these decisions.
5. Consider the effect of Ali's determination on his own personal growth and development. What does Ali come to learn in the course of the film?
6. Give your own conclusion to the film

### **Lumumba**

Directed by Raoul Peck (2000)

1. Describe Lumumba's character. What was he like as a leader?
2. What compromises should a person make in order to govern well and what should they never be compromised?
3. Human resilience can soar to extremes when moved for a cause in search of truth and justice. Discuss Lumumba's fight for freedom as described in relation to the movie.
4. You can kill the messenger but not the message. Is this reflected in the movie?

5. Analyze the support given in this film to colonial Congo by foreign countries. Suggest one way of giving suitable support to a situation within the world.

### **Buena Vista social club**

Directed by Wim Wenders (1999)

*"To try and do justice to these amazing people and let music speak for itself" Wim Wenders*

1. Identify two musicians in the film that stood out to you.
2. What elements of Cuban culture were displayed in the film?
3. Discuss the role of this music for Cuban society.
4. Examine the way music speak for itself in this film.
5. Did the musicians appear fulfilled in their art? Name one example.
6. Evaluate art and its importance in fulfilling the aspirations of these artists. Relate this to your own experience and consider the things that help fulfill your own aspirations.

### **Shawshank Redemption**

Directed by Frank Darabont (1994)

*"Remember Red, hope is a good thing... maybe the best of things." Andy Dufresne (Tim Robbins)*

1. Recall four moments in the film where the characters were able to express their freedom. What does this tell us about the nature of freedom, hope and redemption?
2. Is a person inevitably sensitive to humanity regardless of his or her individual situation?
3. Andy and Red discuss the meaning of hope. Red then gets up and walks away. Why do you think he does this?
4. Give one example from your own life where hope has fuelled your courage in face of difficulties.
5. Compare and contrast the experience of Brooks from the experience of Red, following their release. How does Red's friendship with Andy inform his decision-making?

### **Schindlers List**

Directed by Steven Spielberg (1993)

*"If you save one life you save the world..."*

1. Discuss the use of color in this film. Why do you think Spielberg incorporated color in this way and what does it tell us about Schindler's view of the human person?
2. Is a person inevitably sensitive to humanity regardless of his or her individual situation?
3. What ethical questions are raised concerning the worth of the person within a life or death situation?
4. Outline the important historical lessons we learn from this film. Are these lessons applicable in the world today?
5. How does Schindler change throughout the film and what makes him change? What does the films conclusion convey about the value of human life?

### **Hero**

Directed by Yimou Zhang (2002)

1. Identify what each color symbolizes? How do transitions between the colors bring unity to the film's story?
2. What traits are necessary for true heroism?
3. How does director Yimou Zhang compose the film's cinematography to help the viewer contemplate the meaning of sacrifice?
4. Does the film finish with a clear message? If so what is the message?
5. What is the role of human suffering and sacrifice in building a just world?
6. How should cultural clashes be resolved? Use the answers to question 5 in this examination.