

Special Topics in Film Narrative: Social Issues in Film

ENGL 4543 Fall 2023 Syllabus

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Email is the best way to reach me.

OFFICE HOURS

Monday: 10-11 a.m.

Tuesday: 10-11 a.m.

Wednesday: 10-11 a.m. and 2-3 p.m.

Thursday: 10-11 a.m.

And by appointment

CLASS MEETS - TR, 11:00 a.m -12:20 p.m., PY205

FILMS/SERIES

- ❖ “Arkangel,” *Black Mirror* (2017; dir. Jodie Foster; runtime 52 min)
- ❖ *The Florida Project* (2017; dir. Sean Baker; runtime 1 hr 52 min)
- ❖ “Replay,” Jordan Peele’s *Twilight Zone* (2019; dir. Gerard McMurray; runtime 44 min)
- ❖ *Get Out* (2017; dir. Jordan Peele; runtime 1 hr 44 min)
- ❖ “Men Against Fire,” *Black Mirror*; dir. Jakob Verbruggen; runtime 60 min)
- ❖ *El Norte* (1984; dir. Gregory Nava; runtime 2 hr 20 min)
- ❖ “Nosedive,” *Black Mirror* (2016; dir. Joe Wright; runtime 63 min)
- ❖ *Barbie* (2023; dir. Greta Gerwig; runtime 1 hr 54 min)

We will watch the films/series in class. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to watch on your own. You should also plan to purchase/rent copies if you are writing about a film.

Here’s how to do so:

- All *Black Mirror* episodes are on Netflix (subscription is \$15.49/month)
- *Twilight Zone* episode “Replay” is on Amazon (\$2.99/rent or free with ads on Freevee)

- *The Florida Project*; Amazon (\$2.99/rent; \$9.99/buy); also available free on Kanopy: <https://www.kanopy.com/en/mwsu/video/5324502>
- *Get Out*; Amazon (\$3.99/rent; \$14.99/buy); Moffett Library also has a DVD you can check out
- *El Norte*; Amazon (\$3.99/rent; \$9.99/buy)
- *Barbie*; TBD

CLASS READINGS

We will read essays about the films. These essays will be available in D2L. I would prefer that you read the essay(s) after our initial viewing of the film so that you can bring the fresh eyes of the original audience to the content and form. No other textbooks are required.

COURSE OBJECTIVE

We will consider both content and form of each work as well as cultural and historical context within which the film/episode. Students will develop a vocabulary to discuss the formal/technical aspects of film. They will also become conversant in how film comments on the society, cultural, and historical movements of the time in which it was created.

- **Course Content Note:** By its very nature, film can be a vibrant and graphic medium for the portrayal of the depth and breadth of human experience. The films and shows we will watch may contain difficult or painful subjects and themes. While I will give you a brief overview of the films before we watch them, I think it is important to view the work the first time with the fresh eyes of the original audience. We will spend significant time after our viewing to deconstruct and discuss what we have watched. I am happy to talk with students about concerns they have related to the films we watch.

Film/Series Pairings:

I have paired each of the films with a *Black Mirror* or *Twilight Zone* episode with either similar themes or ideas that I want us to consider together. The larger theme of the class is “Social Issues in Film.” I have defined this fairly broadly. We will look at four types of issues/problems in our society: childhood, parenting, and economic influences on families; immigration and the “other”; race and racism; and gender roles as defined by society. A brief description of each follows.

- **Childhood, parenting, and economic influences on parenting.**
Black Mirror episode “Arkangel” and *The Florida Project*
 Questions to consider: what role does surveillance (or lack thereof) play in a child’s experience of the world? How do economic factors impact child rearing?

→ **Race and racism; racial violence; the “colonization” of Black bodies**

Twilight Zone episode “Replay” and *Get Out*

What are some common themes in both shows? How is racial violence presented in both? How does one escape racial violence?

→ **Immigration, the process of “othering,” “the other” as a cultural construct**

Black Mirror episode “Men Against Fire” and *El Norte*

What does it mean to call someone “other”? What makes a person the “other”? How might this shape their treatment in society?

→ **Gender roles; social media**

Black Mirror episode “Nosedive” and *Barbie*

What role does the social construction of “popularity” play in the construction of self? How is this concept of self gendered? How does gender impact perceptions in society? What role does social media play in this construction of self?

ASSIGNMENTS

15% Short Paper

20% Midterm Exam

20% Final Exam

Project, which will include:

10% Proposal

20% Formal Research Paper

15% Presentation

ACADEMIC HONESTY AND AUTHENTIC VOICE

I have included the standard policies below, but, first, I want to focus on what I call *Academic Honesty and Authentic Voice*. At this point in your college career, you will likely have written several (or more) essays analyzing, explicating, and/or interrogating a variety of texts. Some of these (I hope most) have challenged you to begin the process of finding your authentic academic voice. Who are you? What do you have to say about the world/society/a particular topic/book/film/essay?

Finding your authentic voice can be compared to a journey – one that may not have a clear beginning or likely even an end. The big question I hear from many students: How do I (a student) enter the conversation that began before I even started on this journey?

The most important thing is that you work to develop and hone your own authentic voice. For that reason I have included the note (see below in policies) about the use of AI in our class.

POLICIES

Attendance Policy:

I expect each student to be in class each day, on time, and prepared for each class meeting. Preparation includes doing any assigned reading or completing assignments before coming to class on that day. Students who do not maintain regular attendance in the course may be dropped from the course. No more than four absences in this Tuesday/Thursday class are allowable. If you have extenuating circumstances, please speak with me about them.

Late Work Policy:

Late work will receive a one-letter grade penalty for each day it is late unless you have spoken to me ahead of time to explain the circumstances that require an extension. Extensions are granted on a case-by-case basis and should not be expected.

Plagiarism Policy:

Plagiarism is the use of someone else's thoughts, words, ideas, or lines of argument in your own work without appropriate documentation (a parenthetical citation at the end and a listing in "Works Cited")—whether you use that material in a quote, paraphrase, or summary. Penalties for plagiarism in this course can include failure of an assignment, failure of the course, and/or a formal university report of plagiarism.

→ A Special Note about the Use of Artificial Intelligence in this class:

You should not use any AI to create or compose any of your work for the class at any stage of the assignments—not in the drafting stage or in the revising stage. I expect your work to be completely your own. Turnitin has an AI program that detects the underlying code of a document that comes from an AI producing program. I will use this program. Essays that are found to contain AI may receive a zero grade.

Student Access:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Disability Support Services in Room 168 of the Clark Student Center, 397-4140.

Safe Zone Statement:

I consider this classroom to be a place where you will be treated with respect as a human being – regardless of gender identity, race, ethnicity, national origin, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, political beliefs, age, or ability. Additionally, diversity of thought is appreciated and encouraged, provided you can agree to disagree. It is my expectation that ALL students consider the classroom a safe environment.

Contacting Your Instructor:

Feel free to contact me either via phone or email. Email is generally a faster way to reach me. Please understand that I will respond on the next business day if you contact me on weekends or after hours.

Syllabus revised: J. Dawes, 8/2023

Class Schedule

Week One

T, 8/29–Course Introduction

Th, 8/31–Reading a Film

Week Two

T, 9/5–Arkangel

Th, 9/7–Discussion; Begin Florida Project (FP)

Week Three

T, 9/12–FP

Th, 9/14–discussion; assign short paper

Week Four

T, 9/19–workshop short paper (bring 2 copies of draft)

Th, 9/21–Replay

Week Five

T, 9/26–Get Out (GO); **Short paper due**

Th, 9/28–GO

Week Six

T, 10/3–Discussion

Th, 10/5–Prepare for Midterm/Catch Up

Week Seven

T, 10/10–**Midterm Exam**

Th, 10/12–Men Against Fire

Week Eight

T, 10/17–El Norte (EN)

Th, 10/19–EN

Week Nine

T, 10/24–EN

Th, 10/26–Discussion

Week Ten

T, 10/31–Nosedive

Th, 11/2–Discussion; Assign Project

Week Eleven

T, 11/7–Barbie (B)

Th, 11/9–B

Week Twelve

T, 11/14–Discussion; **Proposal due**

Th, 11/16–Catch up

Week Thirteen

T, 11/21–Instructor conferences

Th, 11/23–Thanksgiving

Week Fourteen

T, 11/28–Workshop project paper

Th, 11/30–Class Presentations

Week Fifteen

T, 12/5–Class Presentations

Th, 12/7–Class Presentations; **Project paper due**

Week Sixteen

Final Exam: Tuesday, December 12, 1-3 p.m.

Saturday, 12/16: MSU Commencement