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Stagecoach

Teacher's Guide

INTRODUCTION



Perhaps no film exploits the visual resources of the Western landscape more brilliantly than John Ford's 1939 *Stagecoach*. After a brief introduction the film opens on a street in one of those western towns characterized by false fronts. The rushing motion of the horses and wagons along the street and the long vista down the street and out into the desert immediately makes us aware of the surrounding wilderness and of the central theme of movement across it which will dominate the film. This opening introduction of the visual theme of fragile town contrasted with epic wilderness will be developed throughout the film in the contrast between the flimsy stageocach and the magnificent landscape through which it moves. . . .

Several brief scenes lead up to the departure of the stagecoach. These scenes are cut at a rather breathless pace, intensifying the sense of motion and flight generated by the opening. Visually, they dwell on two aspects of the town, its dark, narrow and crowded interiors and artificial character of town life. Then the stagecoach departs on its voyage and we are plunged into the vast openness and grandeur of the wilderness with the crowded wooden stagecoach serving as a visual reminder of the narrow town life it has left behind. Ford chose to shoot the major portion of the stagecoach's journey in Monument Valley . . . This combination of large open desert broken by majestic upthrusts of rock and surrounded by threatening hills creates an enormously effective visual environment for the story, which centers around the way in which the artificial social roles and attitudes of the travelers break down under the impact of the wilderness. Those travelers who are able to trranscend their former roles are regenerated by the experience: the drunken doctor delivers a baby, the meek salesman shows courage, the whore becomes the heroine of a romance and the outlaw becomes a lover. By stunning photographic representation of the visual contrasts of desert, hills and moving stagecoach, Ford transforms the journey of the stagecoach into an epic voyage.

—by John G. Cawelti. This passage excerpted from *The Six-gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U. P, 1999) pp. 26-27

HISTORICAL/CULTURAL CONTEXT

Stagecoach was produced in 1939 during the Great Depression. Europe was at war, although Americans would not be drawn into this world conflict until 1941. The film's cast of characters would have resonated with audiences of the times, who recognized Gatewood as representative of the corrupt bankers who had caused America's economic collapse. "What's good for the banks is good for America," he pontificates during the journey. More importantly, the class warfare played out within the rocking coach reinforced social prejudices of the times. The film argues for the dignity of all people, regardless of class. The divisiveness inside the coach, contrasted with the rugged landscape outside, will destroy all unless they can find a way to rise above their intolerance and work together. No doubt many who viewed *Stagecoach* were immigrants who were themselves struggling for acceptance in America. The film changed the Western genre significantly, from B-grade to A-class feature status. In 1995, the National Film Preservation Board named *Stagecoach* to the National Film Registry as a film of historical, cultural and aesthetic significance.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will

- identify basic story elements in narrative films, including character, setting, conflict, rising action, resolution, and theme;
- explain the purpose of and elements of each of the three acts in a film's narrative structure, including inciting incident, rising action, falling action, climax, and resolution;
- define exposition and identify expository details in a scene;
- distinguish between literary and cinematic conventions;
- understand how visual symbols are used to communicate meaning and to create depictions in a film.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS TO THE TEACHING GUIDE

- *Stagecoach* DVD
- *Stagecoach* PowerPoint (PPT)
- Western Film Reader, Module 2

Lesson	Materials	Activities
1: Act One – The Passengers in the Coach	DVD Chapters 1 – 7 PPT slides 2 – 4 Western Film Reader: • "The Coach Driver" • "From Mud to Hubs"	A: Narrative Structure: Characters and Conflict B: Elements of Composition: The Frame C: Historical Contexts: Traveling by Stagecoach, 1880s
2: Act Two – Journey through Apache Country	DVD Chapters 8 - 14 PPT slides 5 - 6 Western Film Reader: • "Paradox About the Past in *Stagecoach*" • The Apaches and How to Deal with Them"	D: Narrative Structure: Rising Action E: Elements of Composition: Reaction Shot and Juxtaposition of Shots F: Creating Depictions: Social Class and Prejudice in *Stagecoach*
3: Act Three – Redemption in Lordsburg	DVD Chapters 15 - 21 PPT slides 7 - 12 Western Film Reader: • "Based on American Folk Song—Scoring *Stagecoach*"	G. Narrative Structure: Climax and Falling Action H. Elements of Composition: The Soundtrack I. Research and Argument: Class Consciousness Today

Lesson 1 Act One—The Passengers in the Coach

Activity A: Narrative Structure—Characters and Conflict

PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION – NARRATIVE STRUCTURE

- **Define *narrative structure.*** The five key elements of a narrative—whether prose or cinematic—are character, setting, conflict, plot, and theme. Structure is different. It is not what happens to whom in a story, it is *how the story is told.* In film, the *how* depends on the decisions the director makes, including the order, or sequence, of action in the film as well as the way the director presents the action. Often what the film is about will determine how the director plans and

arranges the shots and scenes.

- **Review with students the three-act structure that most movies follow.** Explain that while a director's style of storytelling may be unique, the basic structure of the story typically follows this three-act structure.

  Act 1. During the first act, the director introduces the setting and the main characters, providing necessary background information about each character. In a Western film, the setting is always in the American West or Southwest near the "frontier," where social order and lawlessness collide. The time period is the mid to late 19th century.

  The first act usually ends with an *inciting incident,* an event or situation that sets in motion the rising action. The inciting incident is not the same thing as a story's conflict. Rather, it sets conflict in motion and is sure to complicate—if not change forever—the lives of the main characters.

  Act 2. The second act of a film is *rising action,* the cause-and-effect events that occur, leading to a climax. The *climax* is the turning point in the story. In a Western film, very often the climax is the confrontation between two foes, often—but not always—a gunfight.

  Act 3. The final act in a film has two important elements: *falling action* is all of the events that occur after the climax until the story's end; *resolution* is the outcome of the events that occurred and the suggested consequences of that outcome. Often the consequences are not stated directly but rather implied through visual and sound symbols. By the end of the story, the main characters have changed somehow. Either they have changed personally or their view of others or the world has changed.

SCREENING: *STAGECOACH* CHAPTERS 1 – 7, WATCHING *VS.* SEEING

- **Distribute Screening Sheet for Lesson 1, Activity A – Characters and Conflict**. Review the questions on the screening sheet prior to viewing the opening chapters of the film to ensure students know what they will be expected to discuss following the screening. Note: Teachers may opt to have students work in pairs or small groups and screen the first 30 minutes independently, completing the chart on their own. Then rescreening the opening chapter in class, prior to discussing their responses, the students will have an opportunity to observe *how* the director introduces the characters. The nuances of costumes, dialogue and especially the actions and reactions of others will become more identifiable with a second screening.

- **Screen DVD from the film's beginning through the end of chapter 7** (approximately the first 28 minutes of the film.) Use the questions and recommended answers below, as well as the screening sheet, to guide students in identifying elements of narrative structure in Act 1.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. After the opening credits, what are the first three shots in the film and what do these shots communicate to the audience? *First shot: Ford established the setting as the American West, showing a vast, uninhabited and arid landscape with buttes in the distance, signaling the Southwestern desert. Two horsemen, initially dwarfed in the distance, ride towards the camera. As they near, the audience sees one rider holding a gun and hears the gallop of the horses. These men are in hurry. Second shot: The first shot dissolves, or fades, to a cavalry camp where a soldier is raising the flag and another sounds the bugle. Again the riders of the first shot are in the distance and ride towards the camera, not slowing but continuing past the camera. The audience may surmise at this early point that these men are army scouts. Third shot: This shot likewise dissolves to the interior of a army headquarters. The adobe walls suggest this, too, is the American Southwest. The audience must infer that the two riders they saw in the opening shots are now the men leaning over the desk making their report to*

the officer.

2. Two key pieces of information are presented in the scene inside the army officer's headquarters, although if the audience were not listening carefully, they might miss this. What information is presented? *The Apaches have been burning/raiding the ranches in the hills and the telegraph message the soldier receives is from Lordsburg but the message is incomplete. The line has gone dead. This communicates immediately to the audience a conflict—white settlers* vs. *Native Americans, specifically Apaches. The scene ends with a single word message: Geronimo. Audiences, especially those familiar with the Western genre, would understand the seriousness of the conflict.*

3. Review student responses on the screening sheet. Suggested points of discussion are included below.

SCREENING SHEET LESSON 1, ACTIVITY A: CHARACTERS AND CONFLICT

Character	Costuming and composition of Shots introducing the character	Expository information—stated directly or implied—about the character
Mrs. Lucy Mallory	*Dressed conservatively in hat and gloves and shawl, the audience first meets Mrs. Mallory as she steps from the coach. Buck advises her to stretch her "legs," then quickly corrects himself and says" limbs." The choice of words is important. In the 19th century, legs was a vulgar, or common, term—thus the reason why Buck corrects himself. She reacts sharply when he suggests she looks a little "peaked," meaning ill. Her behavior suggests poise but also a superior attitude. Her body language is tight, her arms tight and hands wrapped in front of her.*	*The dialogue reveals that she is traveling to meet her husband in Lordsburg. Bits of conversation between Mrs. Mallory and her friends suggests she may not be feeling completely well. Hatfield, who has observed her arrival, refers to her as an "angel," "a gentle woman" and "a great lady."*
Captain Hatfield	*The first image of him is outside the restaurant where he lingers to eavesdrop on Mrs. Mallory's conversation with her friends. Dressed grandly, with a caped jacket and carrying a cane, he removes his hat as Mrs. Mallory passes him, suggesting he is a gentleman. Students should note, however, the cold, upturned reaction of the other woman as she walks past Hatfield, suggesting he is not what he seems.*	*Hatfield is "not a gentleman" says the army officer and his wife calls him "a notorious gambler." As Hatfield boards the stage, he tells the sheriff that he can shoot straight if necessary and the sheriff indicates that he knows this all too well. Students must infer that Hatfield has been involved in one or more gun flights.*
Ringo Kid	*We learn about Ringo before we actually see him. He is the last character to make his appearance and when he does it is in a dramatic zoom to a close-up of his face. He stands holding his saddle and rifle and has flagged the coach to stop.*	*The sheriff says he busted out of the pen and a posse is hunting him down. He believes Ringo is hoping to get revenge on Luke Plummer, whose testimony sent Ringo to jail. Buck, the coach driver, seems happy that Ringo escaped, which is a contradiction—usually an escaped outlaw signals fear. Students must infer that Ringo is somewhat popular, at least with Buck. Once Ringo appears, we learn that he has a lame horse and that is why he is on foot and also that he saw ranches burning, implying the Apache threat is near.*

Mr. Gatewood	*The audience first sees the doors to the Miner's and Cattleman's Bank, signaling a change of setting. Inside the payroll is delivered to Gatewood who, dressed as a businessman complete with tie and vest, stands behind a desk and signs a receipt for $50,000. He complains that the mining company should have put the payroll money into the bank sooner, but the men don't buy this. Once the men leave, a medium shot on Gatewood shows him scowling. The director controls how the audience sees Gatewood, as unsympathetic and pompous.*	*Gatewood runs the bank. Students should note how Gatewood delivers his first of what will be many preachy statements: "What's good for the banks is good for the country." He is married to the leader of the women's Law and Order League and she seems to boss him around. Visually, we see him slip the mining payroll into his carrying case.*
Dallas	*The first shot of her is walking down the boardwalk escorted by a deputy with a group of prim-looking women behind her. Others, primarily men, stare as she passes. This movement across the screen is significant, as if Dallas is running a gauntlet, being publicly humiliated. Her facial expression indicates angst if not anger. Her clothing is more brightly patterned and frilly than the other ladies.*	*She is apparently friendly with Doc as she appeals to him for help. Her question is significant relative to Ford's intended theme: "Don't I have a right to live? What have I done?" Students must infer from the difference in costuming between her and the Ladies of the Law and Order League, as well as the deputy's line that he is only following "orders," that she has a questionable character. Some students may call her a prostitute and would likely be accurate in terms of her occupation. She has pride, however, which is indicated after she boards the coach and refuses to step out, despite the threat of Apaches. Her line "There are worse things than Apaches" is sarcastic because the next shot—although very quick—is of the ladies of the law and order league who have run her out of town.*
Doc Boone	*He enters the film intoxicated, being kicked out of his room in the boarding house. He scoffs at his landlady, quoting Shakespeare. Although dressed like a professional man, he is a bit rumpled. His hat is cocked back on his head. He links arms with Dallas, indicating to the audience that they are in the same state of social disgrace. "Two of a kind," says one of the prim women of the Law and Order League.*	*He has not paid his rent nor has he paid his bar bill. He has practiced medicine for quite some time and has lived in town long enough to know the people. The ladies of the Law and Order League say that Doc couldn't "doctor a horse," suggesting their negative opinion of him.*
Mr. Peacock	*The first image of Peacock is also stepping out from the stage. Like Mrs. Mallory, he is dressed in clothing proper for a gentleman. In a later shot, inside the saloon, Doc—as well as others—will confuse him as being a clergyman, i.e. a "reverend". The audience must infer why—in part it is his appearance (neatly dressed, but short and seemingly vulnerable) and in part it is his acquiescing behavior.*	*From the bartender we learn that Peacock is a whiskey drummer, or salesman. Peacock reveals in his dialogue that he is from Kansas City, Kansas. He has a wife and five children. He is anxious to get home his family.*

- **Ask students to identify the *inciting incident* that happens at the end of this act.** *The group decision is to continue to Lordsburg, despite the increased danger. This is the inciting incident because had they chosen differently, very likely they would have returned to Tonto without incident. Going forward, however, means traveling into the unknown. If they returned, the plot would simply dead-end.*

- **Conclude the activity by asking students to classify each stagecoach passenger into one of two categories: respectable and disreputable**. They should provide a reason for classifying each character this way. Not all students will agree on the grouping as no doubt some will think those considered "social outcasts" (Doc, Dallas, Ringo) have more honest or admirable characteristics.

Activity B: Elements of Composition: The Frame

- **Define composition.** *Composition* is the arrangement of all the elements that contribute to the appearance of a picture. The elements work together to create meaning. Emphasize the importance of composition in telling a story visually. Scenes are made up of shots, and shots are made up of single images called frames. Composition is one of the primary means by which the filmmaker tells a story. Learning to identify elements of composition, therefore, is an important visual literacy skill. It is also a critical-thinking skill, for often the meaning conveyed is implicit rather than explicit.

- **Display Power Point Slide 2 to introduce students to the concept of the frame as a format for cinematic composition**. Use the discussion points below to explain film's unique format—the rectangular size and shape of the screen. The boundaries of the screen determine the composition of each frame.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. List all the objects and people you see in this frame. *People, chairs, curtains, a window, and outside the window more people and horses, buildings. Some might even list the printing on the window.*

2. What do you notice about the arrangement of the people and objects relative to one another? *The two women are seated close to one another and so are likely acquainted and talking. Their dress indicates they are ladies (as opposed to saloon girls or cowgirls). The man standing near them is an army officer, again indicated by his clothing. The setting is suggested as somewhat plush, because of the curtains and the type of chairs. They are not, for example, in a saloon but perhaps a hotel. They are each looking out of the window.*

3. Where is the camera placed and why? *Behind the women, although fairly close to them so that the audience can see details. The placement is behind them so that the audience can share the same vantage point or view that the ladies and the officer have—which is the man in the street.*

4. How is this composition a frame within a frame? Who, in particular, is framed within this composition and why do you think the director composed the shot just this way? *Draw students' attention to the pane of glass and how it frames the man in the white hat and cape. This framing is not accidental and is the director's way of composing the shot so as to make this man, who is walking away, the point of emphasis. This is indeed the person the others are looking at and talking about.*

- **Display Power Point Slide 3.** Ask students to compare the composition of this frame with PPT 2, just discussed.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. How does the interior of this building differ from the interior of the building in PPT 2? *Focus students' attention on the window treatment and the walls. This is an adobe structure and the window, although paned, is much smaller and deeper. A cactus is seen through the window. Students should infer that while this may also be a hotel or restaurant, it is more rustic and rural.*

2. Comment on the arrangement of the people around the table. What meaning is being conveyed in this arrangement? *Three people are seated at one end while two are seated together in the foreground. A woman serves. The two men in the background are dressed in suits, suggesting upper social class. The woman seated with them is likewise costumed as a lady, especially in comparison to the woman serving the coffee. The couple closest to the camera includes a cowboy or range rider, again inferred by his dress, and a lady whose posture is rigid. He looks at her. She looks down. The three in the background are not looking at the couple at all. Empty plates suggest there are other people who may be joining them, or that open seats were available closer together but for whatever reason the people have grouped themselves separately.*

- **Display Power Point Slide 4 to explain the difference in how a novelist and filmmaker develop characterization.** Review the points on the slide, explaining that whereas a novelist or short story writer communicates using literacy devices, filmmakers communicate using cinematic devices. They are related but distinctly different. Why is this? Because writing a story to be viewed rather than read requires specific tools. A novelist can tell you what a character is thinking, for example. A filmmaker must suggest this through composition and types of shots, as well as the sequence of shots. Explain that in each of the lessons for *Stagecoach*, they will learn more about cinematic devices.

- **Display Power Point Slides 5 – 7 to introduce students to the concept of cinematic devices.** Explain that composition is one cinematic device filmmakers use to tell a story.

  Slide 5
  Review the four points on the slide.

  Slide 6
  Ask students to comment on the composition of this still from the movie, paying particular attention to Ringo's posture as well as to lighting and background detail.

  Slide 7
  Ask students to comment on the visual symbolism of the composition of this frame. How do the lighting and the placement of the camera help to create depth? What meaning might be suggested in Dallas walking out of the dark and toward the light? Why include Ringo in this frame? What does the director want the audience to think or feel?

Activity C: Historical Contexts—Traveling by Stagecoach, 1880s

- **Define *Pre-Production.*** This is the first stage in making a film. During pre-production the director works closely with the Production Designer to create the fictional world of the movie. The *production designer*, often called the art director, is the person responsible for designing the physical world of the movie. While sets can be constructed, attention to historical detail is necessary for the scenes in the movie to be credible. Very often the first step in designing a movie set is research.

  Ask:
  1. What challenges might a production designer face when making a movie about the American West in the 1880s? *Some students may suggest that they have to find the right locations to film the movie, which is correct. But that, too, poses a challenge. In 1939, much—although not all—of the American West had changed significantly. Modern buildings and paved streets, automobiles and traffic lights are just some of the physical*

changes in the setting.

2. What sources of historical information may be available to a production designer when researching a historical setting for a movie? *Answers will vary and should include not only historical societies and textbooks but also primary source documents, like diaries, letters, newspaper and magazine articles and illustrations. Also useful is art depicting the period.*

- **Display PowerPoint Slide 8** to introduce students to the work of Frederic Remington. A painting such as this one, completed by Remington in 1901, could be a source of inspiration and historical reference for a production designer of a Western film. Ask students to discuss what other visual sources, dated in the 1850s through the 1880s, could also provide historical detail. Some examples include the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) and the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

- **Display PowerPoint Slide 9.** This is an image of a stagecoach traveling through a cut in the Rocky Mountains, Colorado, taken sometime between 1869 and 1879. Tell students that a very similar shot of the stagecoach will appear near the end of the film (at DVD 1:06). Explain, also, that stereograph cards were a popular form of entertainment in the 19th century. A production designer wishing to research period pieces might have included stereograph cards. While they can research additional stereograph cards online at the Library of Congress, remind students that in 1939, computer technology, including digital reproductions of old photographs, did not exist.

- **Introduce the independent reading activities, using passages from the Western Film Reader, Module 2.** Explain that students are going to read excerpts from two memoirs that were recorded in the late 1930s. In both passages, the person is describing their lives in the American West during the 1880s, specifically the experience of traveling by stagecoach. Students should be prepared to discuss the passages relative to historical detail and how, if at all, *Stagecoach* mirrors their experience.

GUIDED DISCUSSION
"The Coach Driver" (Western Film Reader, Module 2)

1. This interview was conducted in the late 1930s, approximately the same period in which the film *Stagecoach* was made. In your opinion, would Charles Imus have found the depictions of the driver accurate to his experiences? Provide a reason to support your opinion.

2. He makes comparisons between the present (*his* present, 1930s) and the past. What are those comparisons? *Condition/construction of the roads and communicating via smoke signals.*

"From Mud to Hubs" (Western Film Reader Module 2)

3. This passage by Mrs. Erret Hicks includes an illustration of the Thorough Brace Coach, which was a marvel of modern transportation *in its time!* What complaints does Mrs. Hicks have about coach travel? *She calls it a torture chamber, which suggests it was very uncomfortable and the duration of the journey—100 miles in three days—was difficult. She also complains, although with amusement, at the foul language of the drivers.*

- **Conclude the activity with a research challenge.** Explain that the Overland Stagecoach Line was an essential link between the American West and the East Coast cities, as it carried mail and money as well as passengers. But it was also an essential network connecting the isolated frontier towns. The research challenge: Locate an accurate historical map of the Arizona and/or New Mexico territories that illustrates the Butterfield Overland Stagecoach Route, especially the route from "Tonto" to "Lordsburg."

Activity D: Narrative Structure—Rising Action

SCREENING *STAGECOACH*, CHAPTER 8 - 14

- **Screen the DVD through the end of Chapter 14** (approximately the next 35 minutes of the film, ending at 1:04). Use the questions and recommended answers below to guide students in identifying elements of narrative structure in Act 2.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. At the dinner table, what information about Hatfield's past does Mrs. Mallory learn? *That he was an officer in her father's regiment. She is from Virginia and so that would mean that Hatfield as well as Mrs. Mallory's father were Confederate officers in the Civil War.*

2. What suggests that Hatfield is not using his real name? *Mrs. Mallory says she doesn't remember a Hatfield in the father's regiment.*

3. Buck and Curley's conversation while driving the stagecoach focuses on Ringo. What new information do you learn about Curley's relationship with Ringo? *He was friends with Ringo's father and Curley has no intention of letting Ringo confront Plummer, because he wants to protect him.*

4. Inside the wagon, the banker talks even though no one seems very interested in what he has to say. What does he talk about? *He talks in quips or slogans like "I don't know what the government is coming to," "America for Americans," "the government must not interfere with business," "reduce taxes," "what this country needs is a businessman for president." Some students may comment that the sayings are not much different from what politicians and businessmen continue to say today.*

5. In your opinion, is Ford's depiction of the banker positive, negative or neutral? Provide a reason for your answer. *Most will agree it is negative. He seems to take up a good amount of space. He complains about government and taxes and delivers his lines as if shouting. The reaction of Mrs. Mallory would suggest she, at least, finds him annoying.*

6. Explain the significance of Hatfield's silver cup and its engraving. What does it suggest about him and also about Mrs. Mallory? How does the cup become another insult to Dallas? *The cup symbolizes gentility and is a relic of Hatfield's past—as Mrs. Mallory recognizes the engraved crest. Hatfield denies it saying he won the cup in a wager. His genteel behavior and his admission of being in Mrs. Mallory's father's regiment suggest otherwise. Hatfield does not offer the cup for Dallas to drink from. This underscores still again that she is of a lower class—at least from Hatfield's perspective.*

7. How does Mrs. Mallory's labor complicate the situation for *all* the passengers? *She delays the passengers from continuing on to Lordsburg. Had they not delayed, they would not have lost the extra horses and they could have perhaps stayed ahead of the Apache raiders.*

8. Why doesn't Yakima, the stagecoach station agent's wife, not assist Dallas and Doc with the birth of Mrs. Mallory's baby? *Answers will vary but should include again the 19th century concept of social class. Upon seeing the station agent's wife, Peacock cries that she is a savage, by which he means "Indian." Having a "savage" attend to a white woman giving birth would be an affront to someone of Mrs. Mallory's class. Having to rely on Doc and Dallas is itself troubling for her but she has no choice.*

   Teacher's note: An excellent discussion on the relationship between Apaches and Mexicans can be found in

Terry Mort's *The Wrath of Cochise* in which he describes the century-long practice of Spanish slave-trading. Yakima might have been taken against her will, and seeing an opportunity—and knowing her people were now close, escaped.

9. In Act 2, Ringo has fallen in love with Dallas but each time he mentions marriage, she changes the subject, encouraging him to escape. Is Dallas not in love with Ringo, or is there another reason for her hesitancy? *Answers will vary but should include the key point that Ringo still does not know the truth about Dallas's past. Dallas asks Doc if marriage is for "a girl like me," suggesting that Dallas in part believes the label society has pinned on her—that she is disgraceful.*

10. At this way station, as at the first, the passengers argue about whether to continue the journey or wait for Mrs. Mallory to recover. What ultimately happens that gives them no choice but to continue? *Smoke signals indicate the Apaches are near.*

- **Conclude the lesson by reading and discussing "Paradox About the Past in *Stagecoach*"** (See Western Film Reader, Module 2).

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. A paradox is a contradiction, often of ideas and behaviors. What is the "paradox" of the past in Western film, according to the author? *The West is mythologized in popular culture as a place where an individual can start life anew without explaining his or her past. And yet the West is representative of America's past, something to be "treasured."*

2. Both Ringo and Hatfield have "a past" that they would rather keep secret. What are they reluctant to talk about? Ringo was in prison, albeit unjustly accused and sentenced. Hatfield was a Confederate officer, whom audiences of the period in which the film was made would associate with chivalry. And yet having come West after the war, he is now a disreputable character, whom Doc suggests has shot at least one man in the back.

3. Dallas, too, has a past but Ringo either doesn't understand what it is (that is, why she is on the stagecoach returning to Lordsburg) or he doesn't care. Which is it? Why do you think so? Answers will vary, and students' understanding of Ringo's behavior toward Dallas will deepen as they screen the rest of the film. But primarily Ringo understands the code of the West—a man's past, and a woman's too, is private. For Ringo and Dallas, the past is not to be treasured but to be forgotten. Otherwise, they would not be able to start anew.

Activity E: Elements of Composition—Reaction Shot and Juxtaposition of Shots

- **Define *reaction shot.*** A reaction shot is a tool used not only to reveal a character's thoughts or feelings but also to create a depiction. It usually shows a character in a medium shot or close-up so that the audience can notice the change of expression or body language.

- **Screen the opening scene of Chapter 8 on the *Stage*coach DVD** (approximately 28:00 through 29:45). Use the pause button to stop the film. Ask students to describe what happened in the film segment. Very simply, Dallas sits at the table, Mrs. Mallory moves to the other end near the open window. Gatewood also moves his seat, although he seemingly has no reason to do so. Ringo thinks the passengers are reacting to his sitting at the table with them.

- Share the following information with students:

  While most reaction shots focus on just one character, usually in a medium to close-up shot, Ford pulls the camera back a bit so that the audience can see the group reaction, all at once which makes the reaction more powerful, more condescending to Dallas. Across the table are Gatewood and Hatfield as well as Mrs. Mallory. Each stops what they are doing—even Doc, standing at the bar turns and stares. Ringo has committed a social faux pas although he seems not to realize that a gentlewoman like Mrs. Mallory would never sit at the same table as a common dance hall girl like Dallas. Dallas's reaction is at first hesitant, but defiantly she takes the seat.

- **Define *juxtaposition of shots***. This is another way a director communicates meaning. Juxtaposition is a combination. The director decides the composition of each shot, the arrangement of the people and objects within the frame and where to place the camera. Next the director must decide how to combine the shots, which one will follow another. Change one shot in the sequence and the meaning also changes.

- **Screen the opening scene of Chapter 8 a second time, again pausing at approximately 29:45.** Tell students to pay attention in this second screening to the juxtaposition of shots. What meaning is conveyed?

- **Conclude the activity by comparing this scene with the scene in Act 1 where the Ladies of the Law and Order league parade Dallas out of town.** Both scenes convey social prejudice and both scenes express the director's ridicule of the "respectable" people in town. But the scene with the Law and Order ladies has humor to it, punctuated in part by the parody of the Protestant hymn "Shall We Gather at the River?" as Doc and Dallas walk arm in arm to the coach. In contrast, the dining scene has no music. In fact the silence as Ringo passes the plates is uncomfortable, as is often the case when one has caused embarrassment in a public gathering. The dinner table scene is more sensitively filmed, in that the reaction shots are subtle. In both scenes, however, Ford's use of composition, reaction shots, and juxtaposition of shots work together to spark audience sympathy for both Ringo and Dallas.

Activity F: Creating Depictions—Social Class and Prejudice in *Stagecoach*

- **Display PowerPoint Slide 10 to discuss historical and cultural documents.** Share this information with students:

  Movies communicate information that is both historical and cultural, but that information is not always factually accurate. History is not a collection of facts. It is an interpretation of facts. Historical documents, including primary source documents—letters, diaries, newspaper articles—are written with a bias and a point of view by someone in a particular period of time and with a specific audience in mind. Knowing how to identify and evaluate historical and cultural bias is an essential critical thinking skill.

- **Distribute for independent reading "The Apaches and How to Deal with Them"** (See Western Film Reader, Module 2). Emphasize that this passage comes from a book written by a silver miner name Sylvester Mowry who settled in the Arizona territory which was, at the time, Apache country and not a part of the United States. Mowry had served in the U.S. Army. This document, therefore, is of the general period in which the film is set—not the period in which the film was made.

  GUIDED DISCUSSION

  1. Cite evidence in the passage from Mowry's book to support his negative bias towards Apaches. *Answers will vary, including connotation of such words as "devils" and ferocious, but also his final paragraph where he proposes the government use any means—including lies and betrayal—to trick the Apaches to surrender and then kill them.*

  2. Mowry wrote his proposition about how to deal with the Apaches in the second half of the 19th century,

having had experience with living in their country. How does the film *Stagecoach* (made in 1939) reinforce, if at all, Mowry's position on the Apaches? *Mowry's message is to annihilate the Apaches by any means possible. The film suggests what Mowry describes as "the savagery of the Apaches"—the shot of Hatfield covering the dead woman at the coach way station, for example—but does not promote the annihilation of the Apaches.*

Teacher's Note: The changing image of Native Americans is covered in much greater detail in Module 3. "Ghosts of a Vanished Frontier" (see Western Film Reader, Module 3), published in 1997 in the *Chicago Tribune*, focuses on attitudes toward Apaches in the 1930s. Some teachers may wish to incorporate discussion of this article into their discussion of depictions of Apaches in *Stagecoach.*

Lesson 3 Redemption at Lordsburg

Activity G: Narrative Structure—Climax and Falling Action

PRE-SCREENING DISCUSSION

- **Review, if necessary, the meaning of *climax* and *falling action*.**

- **Review, if necessary, the meaning of *high angle shot* and *low angle shot*.** In a *high angle shot* the camera is above the subject looking down. Often a director uses this shot to suggest the subject's vulnerability. But the high angle can also provide an interesting perspective from which to see the action. A *low angle shot* has the camera lower than the subject, looking up. The director often uses this shot to suggest a subject's power or size, but again it can also provide an interesting perspective on the action, engaging the audience so that they feel they are a part of the action. Students will see examples of both high angle and low angle shots in the sequence.

SCREENING *STAGECOACH*, CHAPTER 15 - 21

- **Screen the DVD, Chapter 15 through the end of the film** (approximately the last 30 minutes of the film). Use the questions and recommended answers below to guide students in identifying elements of narrative structure in Act 3.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. The first scene in this film segment takes place inside the stagecoach. Mrs. Mallory is weakened by childbirth and is reclined in the arms of Hatfield. Dallas holds the baby. Peacock, for the first time, refers to the "ladies" in the coach. Why is this significant for Dallas? How does the director reveal that she is moved by Peacock's reference? *Answers will vary. Perhaps seeing Dallas with the baby erases any other image Peacock might have had about her. A reaction shot on Dallas shows her surprise and then pleasure that Peacock said "ladies" and not "lady".*

2. Describe what happened at East Ferry and how this complicates the plot. *The station has been raided and the people killed. They are again delayed because the bridge is destroyed and they have to tether the stage to poles in order to raft across.*

3. Once the stage crosses the river, Buck seems relieved, believing they are now out of danger. The camera then pans to a hilltop and the music changes significantly. Why? *He believes, as do the passengers, that they have escaped the Apaches.*

4. What is the first indication that the stagecoach is under attack? *An arrow pierces Peacock's shoulder. Ask students if they were surprised by this shot and if not, then why. Most might indicate that the presence of the Apaches has been noted throughout the film and this being a Western, a conflict with Indians is expected. But also, the director has indicated at the ferry crossing that the Apaches are signaling. The only passenger who notices this is Hatfield.*

5. When the passengers run out of ammunition, Hatfield—who has a single bullet left—makes a decision. What is that decision and what is his motivation for doing this? *He holds the gun to Mrs. Mallory's head, intending to kill her. Answers as to why he does this will vary but should focus on the main idea that without ammunition, the passengers cannot defend themselves and will become captives. The men will surely die. The women may not be killed, but Hatfield understands that women captives can be physically abused and enslaved. He will kill Mrs. Mallory as his final act of chivalry.*

6. The director keeps his camera on Mrs. Mallory when Hatfield is shot. What indicates that Hatfield has been shot and why does the director decide not to show us this immediately? *A shot is heard, Hatfield's hand drops and the gun with it. By focusing our attention on Mrs. Mallory we understand that she is unaware of what Hatfield was about to do to her or that he has been injured. Also, we note then her change of expression as she hears a bugler sounding the charge.*

7. In this movie, the cavalry comes to the rescue. From which direction? Comment also on how the music changes at this point. *The camera angle doesn't necessarily indicate this until the long shot where the stagecoach slows to a stop and the riders continue past. The soldiers have come from Lordsburg. The music becomes more military, a fast-paced version of "Rally 'Round the Flag," a popular Civil War song.*

8. In some Westerns, the cavalry to the rescue scene is the climax of the story. But this is not the case in *Stagecoach.* What issue remains unresolved? What is the climax? *Ringo's vengeance against Luke Plummer is unresolved. The gunfight between Ringo and Plummer is the climax.*

9. What shots in particular at the end of the film indicate that Mrs. Mallory has overcome her distaste for Dallas. How does Dallas show her forgiveness? *On the stretcher, Mrs. Mallory calls to Dallas, addressing her directly for the first time. She attempts to offer her assistance if ever Dallas might need it, but Dallas stops her from saying too much. Dallas shows her forgiveness by draping her shawl over Mrs. Mallory. Mrs. Mallory's gesture of pulling the shawl closer to her is visually symbolic of her acceptance of Dallas.*

10. How does the sheriff of Lordsburg know Gatewood has stolen the payroll? *The telegraph line had been repaired and he received a message. This then explains in part why Gatewood was so anxious to get to Lordsburg (and likely away from Tonto) before his theft could be discovered.*

11. In Lordsburg, at night, Dallas once again walks through town passing others outside the shops and saloons. Compare this scene to the scene of her walking through town in Tonto earlier in the film. What about her has, but also has not, changed? *It is night whereas the other scene was day. She is accompanied by Ringo and not a deputy or the outraged ladies of the Law and Order League. Her life has changed in that she found someone who loves her and has given her hope for a possible new future but only if he survives the gunfight. She is worried about Ringo but aware also of her own secret past. Ringo still does not know the truth about her.*

12. The director chose to show the audience only a part of the gunfight, primarily the tense moments leading up

to it. The last visual "shot" we see is Ringo firing as he dives to the ground. The director then cuts to Dallas where Ringo has left her. The director shows us her reaction rather than the result of the gunfight. Why? *Dallas does not know the outcome of the gunfight and neither does the audience, so focusing on her is a way to keep tension in the audience and to increase empathy for Dallas. Showing Luke Plummer stumbling onto the saloon continues to build suspense. Even when Plummer falls, the audience still does not know the outcome of the gunfight until we actually see Ringo return to Dallas. This is Ford's artistic pacing and visual storytelling at its best.*

13. Both Curley and Doc conspire to help Ringo and Dallas escape. Why is this not a surprise? Why too is it not a surprise that Doc Boone will continue to drink and likely get drunk? *All throughout the film, Curley has been on Ringo's side. Doc, as an outcast, is more than willing to break the law to give Ringo and Dallas a chance to, as he put it, escape the blessings of civilization. His statement is sarcastic. He will continue to drink and get drunk because the stagecoach journey has not really changed him as it has the others. He will remain a social outcast.*

Activity H: Elements of Composition—The Soundtrack

- **Define *production* and *post-production.*** *Production* is the second stage in creating a film. It involves filming the actors as they perform their roles, either on location or on a stage set. *Post-production* is what happens after the director has captured the story on film, which includes selecting shots and editing them together to make a coherent and meaningful story. In post-production, too, the composer works with the director to determine where and how music might enhance the visual storytelling.

- **Define *musical motif*.** A *motif* means a theme. A musical motif is a sound association, linking a particular refrain of music with a person, place or thing.

- **Play the opening credits to *Stagecoach***. Ask students to listen to the soundtrack as the credits play. What association is made between the type of music heard and the images? *The first music heard is the lively stagecoach theme, suggesting movement. The second melody heard, again as we see the coach journeying, is a softer, somewhat slower melody ("Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair," a Stephen Foster song), and the third motif is a percussive tom-tom beat associated with the silhouettes of the Indians on the screen.*

- **Distribute for independent reading "Based On American Folk Song—Scoring *Stagecoach*"** (Western Film Reader, Module 2). Discuss the passage using the questions and recommended answers below.

GUIDED DISCUSSION

1. In the first paragraph, the author states that Ford's use of song is part of his overall cinematic vision. What does she mean? *The selection of music enhances the storytelling and in particular, the atmosphere and authenticity of the story.*

2. In paragraph two, she identifies three functions of songs used in *Stagecoach.* What are they? *To support the theme of the film, to aid in characterization, and to communicate the film's ideology, or belief and ideals.*

3. The author says that "Shall We Gather at the River," a Christian hymn, is played for humor in the scene where Doc and Dallas walk to the stagecoach. How does the audience know that it is intended to parody the Law and Order ladies? *Students must infer that to be Christian is to be kind and helpful to others but by casting Doc and*

Dallas out of town, the Law and Order ladies are decidedly not showing Christian concern for them. The music itself in that scene is played not slow and solemnly, but lively and lightly.

4. Do you agree that refrains of "Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair" help the audience to sympathize, even if just a little, with Mrs. Mallory? *Answers will vary. Audiences of the 1930s would have recognized the song—perhaps far better than audiences of the 21st century. However, after learning that it was a song associated with the South and with genteelness, most students would likely agree.*

5. The association between music and characters and conflict in a film happens, the author says, on an unconscious level. What does she mean? *The audience hears the music but doesn't necessary think about it. Instead, the music acts as an emotional trigger, much the same as dark lighting might trigger a fearful response or a high camera angle might suggest someone is vulnerable. In short, music communicates but implicitly, not explicitly.*

Activity I: Research and Argument: Class Consciousness Today

- **Display PowerPoint Slide 11 to discuss how other nations may perceive American history through film.** Emphasize that film is one way that cultures learn about each other. What perceptions about America and American history might a foreign audience get by viewing *Stagecoach* today?

- **Display PowerPoint Slide 12.** Ask students to comment on whether class consciousness still exists today as it was portrayed in *Stagecoach* in 1939. Encourage them to think about who the present-day Doc and Dallas and Ringo might be?

- **Conclude the unit by asking students to argue whether a present-day Law and Order League would benefit American society.** Students should consider the following points:
  What are the consequences of class consciousness?
  What individual rights might a volunteer Law and Order League violate?
  What can *Stagecoach* teach present-day Americans about tolerance and acceptance?

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Stagecoach Screening Sheet

Lesson 1, Activity A: Characters and Conflict

Directions: During the first 28 minutes of *Stagecoach*, Director John Ford not only establishes the setting and the conflicts for the narrative but also introduces each main character. While viewing the segment, pay close attention to *how* the director presents the characters, including costuming and composition of the shots. Pay attention also to the expository information about each character, as presented through dialogue and visual and sound symbols. After viewing, work with a partner or in a group to complete the chart below.

Character	Costuming and composition of shots introducing the character	Expository information—stated directly or implied—about the character
Mrs. Lucy Mallory		
Captain Hatfield		
Ringo Kid		
Mr. Gatewood		
Dallas		
Doc Boone		
Mr. Peacock		



Stagecoach Teacher's PowerPoint Presentation





Prose Characterization *vs.* Cinematic Composition

Physical Appearance	→	Costuming, make-up, camera angles
Behavior	→	Acting, movement
Speech	→	Dialogue
Thoughts	→	Lighting, juxtaposition of images, sound & visual symbols
Opinion of others	→	Reaction shots

What Are *Cinematic* Devices?

Composition — selection of images and how they are framed

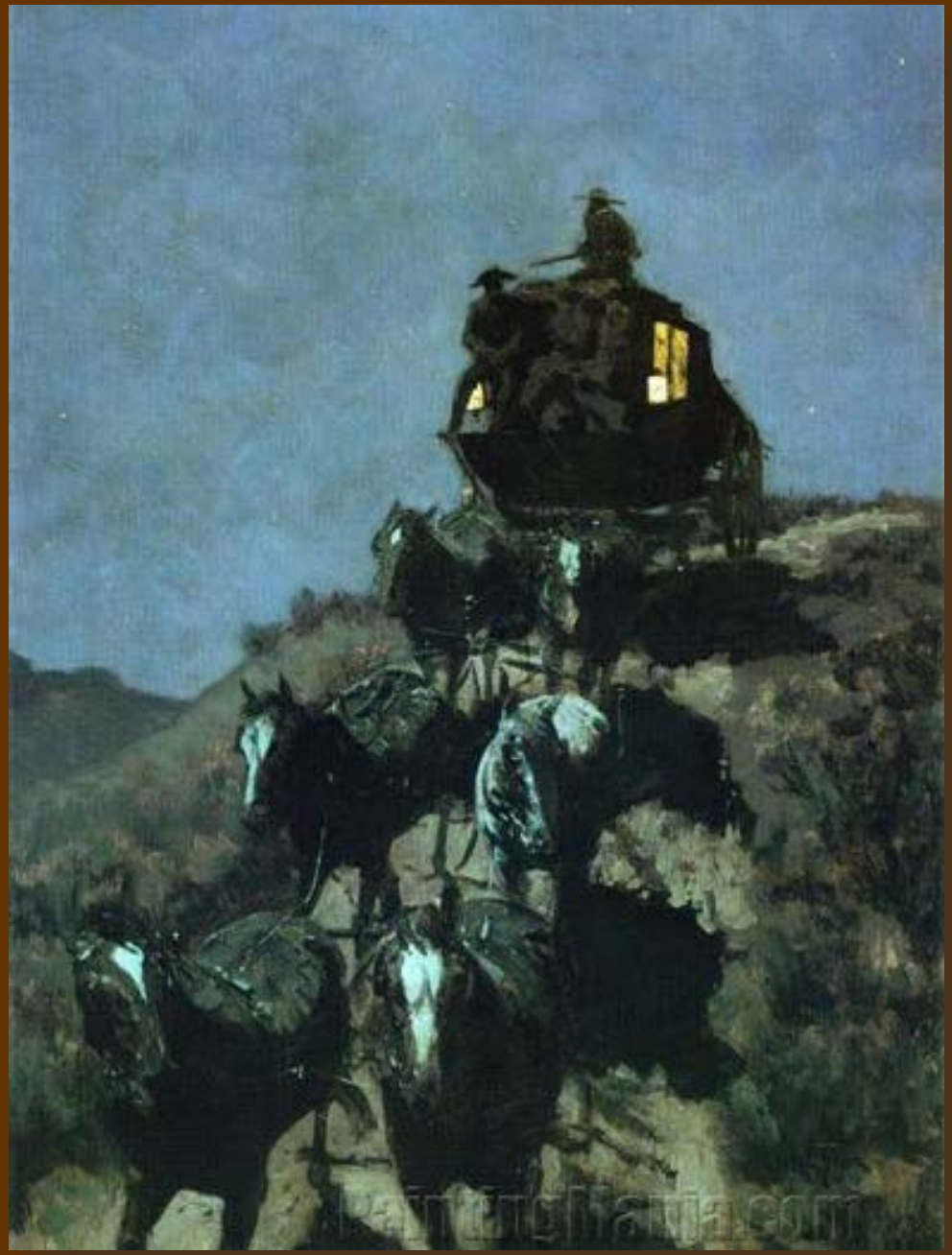
Pacing & Continuity — sequence of images, the juxtaposition and timing of the images

Cinematography — camera distances and angles, lighting and movement

Soundtrack — both visible and invisible sounds as well as music







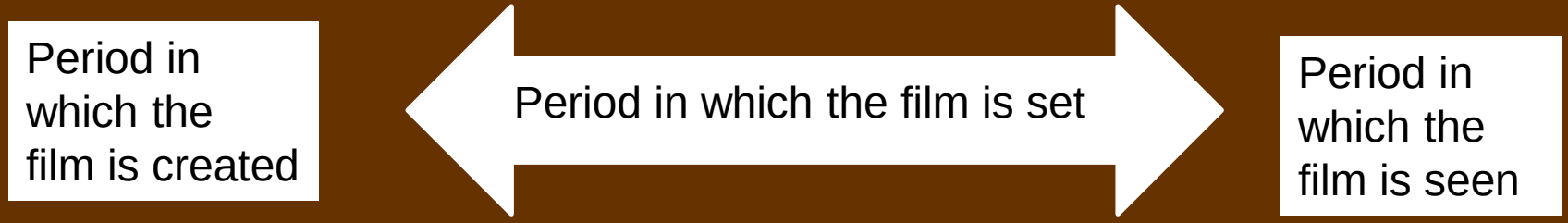
“The Old Stage Coach of the Plains” by Frederic Sackrider Remington, who was a very significant American artist, illustrator, sculptor, and writer who specialized in depictions of the Old American West, specifically concentrating on the last quarter of the 19th century American West and images of cowboys, American Indians, and the U.S. Cavalry.



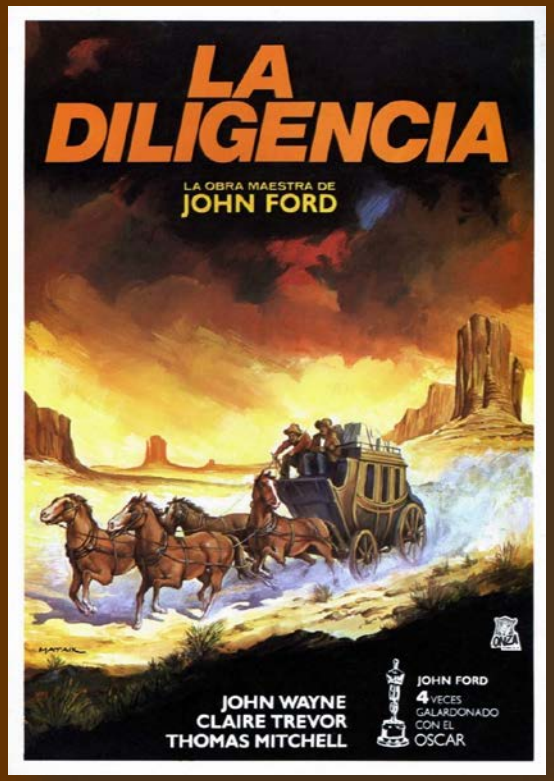
Stagecoach going through the Rocky Mountains (between 1869 and 1879)
Library of Congress, Stereograph Cards Collection

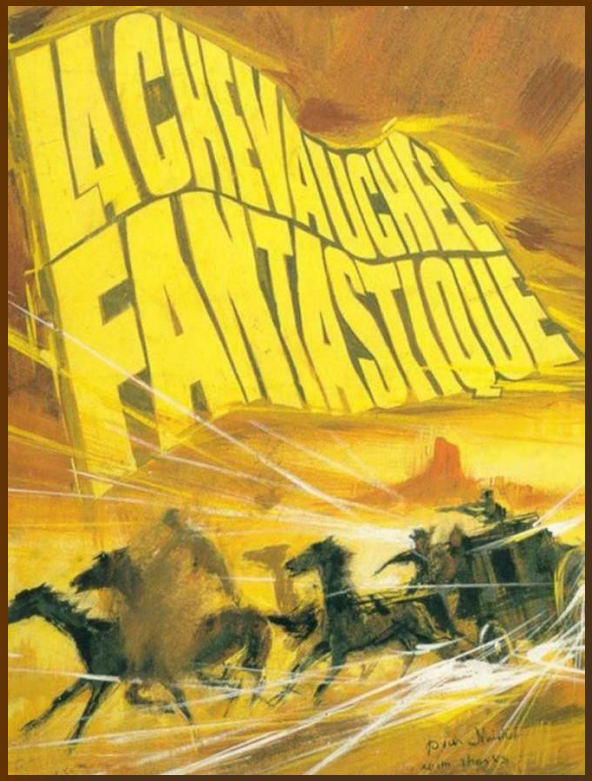
Time & Interpretations

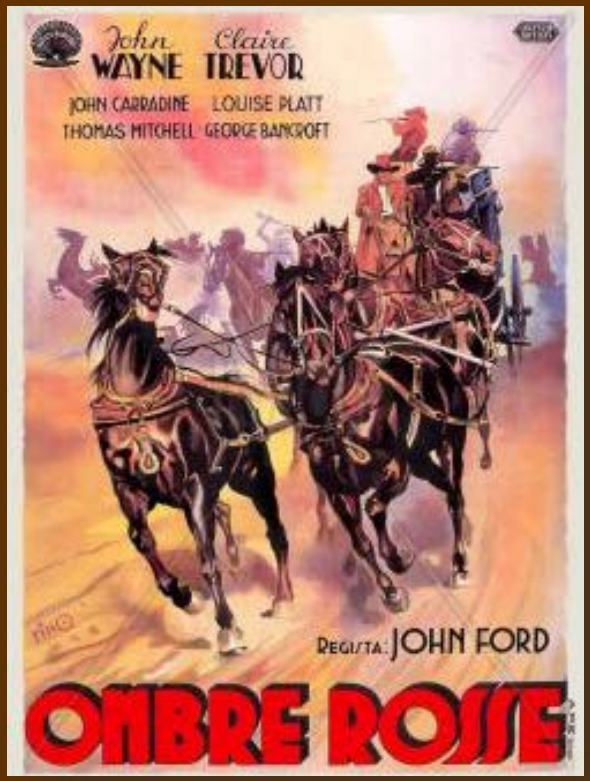
"You can only see the world through your own time, which means that some values disappear, and some values come into closer focus." —Martin Scorsese, Director



Films are a door to understanding our cultural and even historical past. But the key question to ask is not what part of history did the filmmaker get right (or wrong). Rather it is *why* did the filmmaker tell this story in this way at this time?


LA DILIGENCIA
LA OBRA MAESTRA DE
JOHN FORD
JOHN WAYNE
CLAIRE TREVOR
THOMAS MITCHELL
JOHN FORD
4 VECES
GALARDONADO
CON EL
OSCAR


LA CHEVAUCHÉE FANTASTIQUE


John WAYNE
Claire TREVOR
JOHN CARRADINE
LOUISE PLATT
THOMAS MITCHELL
GEORGE BANCROFT
REGISTA: JOHN FORD
OMBRE ROSSE



