

# Cross-Curricular & Visual Literacy Connections

*Portraits of America: Democracy on Film* was created to increase awareness of film’s historical, cultural and artistic significance. The primary objective is visual literacy. The educational resources were developed in accordance with National Film Study Standards, established by The Film Foundation.

The curriculum’s interdisciplinary approach challenges students to tap their knowledge of civics, social studies and history, as well as their knowledge of literature, science, and the arts, to read non-print texts. The scope and sequence of carefully planned activities guide students to deeper critical thinking about how moving images communicate to audiences, influencing their perceptions of themselves and the world. Students learn to read a movie not just for its narrative elements, but also for its use of cinematic devices.

Rather than simply comparing a movie to a print text or questioning what part of history did the filmmakers get right or wrong, the curriculum teaches students how to read a movie on three distinct levels: narrative, cinematic, and historical/cultural. In doing so, the resources align with most standards for teaching social studies, history, English/language arts, art and music. The connections are identified below.

## Social Studies/History

Because a movie is both a historical and cultural document and because the selected films for in-depth study are stories of Americans presented over various historical periods and geographic locations, the curriculum aligns neatly with NCSS standards and the six themes of social studies. Additionally, pre- and post-screening activities challenge students’ historical thinking skills and therefore align also with historical thinking standards established by The National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS).

Social Studies Themes	Historical Thinking Standards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Culture and Cultural Diversity</li><li>• Time, Continuity and Change</li><li>• People, Places, and Environments</li><li>• Individual Development and Identity</li><li>• Individuals, Groups and Institutions</li><li>• Power, Authority, and Governance</li><li>• Product, Distribution, and Consumption</li><li>• Science, Technology and Society</li><li>• Global Connections</li><li>• Civic Ideals and Practices</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chronological Thinking</li><li>• Historical Analysis and Interpretation</li><li>• Historical Research Capabilities</li><li>• Historical Issues-Analyses and Decision-Making</li></ul>

## English/Language Arts and the Arts

The heart of the curriculum is story. Students learn not only to decode the narrative, tapping their knowledge of literacy devices, but also to read the film as a cinematic document which challenges them to identify and interpret *cinematic* devices. The chart below indicates the specific standards addressed as recommended by the National Council of Teachers of English. Additionally, the chart includes standards recommended by the National Arts and Education Network (ArtsEdge) and the National Association for Music Education (NAfME).

English/Language Arts	Art and Music
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of students themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.</li> <li>• Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate all texts.</li> <li>• Read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres—from political cartoons and video segments to news articles and primary source documents.</li> <li>• Understand basic story elements, including character, setting, and plot.</li> <li>• Analyze symbolism and metaphor communicated visually.</li> <li>• Participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.</li> <li>• Link literature and language arts to other disciplines.</li> </ul>	<p>ART:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze, evaluate, and construct meaning from visual images.</li> <li>• Reflect upon and assess the characteristics and merits of the work of others.</li> <li>• Make connections between visual arts and other disciplines.</li> </ul> <p>MUSIC</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listen to, analyze, and describe music.</li> <li>• Evaluate music and music performances</li> <li>• Understand relationship between music, the other arts, and other disciplines.</li> <li>• Understand music in relation to history and culture.</li> </ul>

**Visual Literacy Standards**

Film is more than a commodity. It is a persuasive and universal language. Activities within the Portraits of America curriculum challenge students to read film language and so align most directly with standards 3, 4 and 7 of the visual literacy skills as recommended by The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL)

<b>Visual Literacy</b>
<p>Standard 3: Interpret and analyze the meanings of images and visual media:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify information relevant to an image’s meaning</li> <li>• situate an image in its cultural, social, and historical contexts</li> <li>• identify the physical, technical, and design components of an image</li> <li>• validate interpretation and analysis of images through discourse with others</li> </ul> <p>Standard 4: Evaluate images and their sources:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• evaluate the effectiveness and reliability of images as visual communications</li> <li>• evaluate the aesthetic and technical characteristics of images</li> <li>• evaluate textual information accompanying images and make judgments about the reliability and accuracy of image sources</li> </ul> <p>Standard 7: Understand many of the ethical, legal, social, and economic issues surrounding the creation and use of images and visual media:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cite images and visual media in papers, presentations, and projects</li> </ul>