



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 7 to 12

**About the Author:** Adapted, with permission, from Dr. Cecil Greek's, *Crime and the Media Seminar* (2001), Florida State University

# Cinema Cops

## Overview

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In this lesson students develop awareness of the ways in which public perceptions of law enforcement have been both reflected in and influenced by film and television depictions of police over the past eighty years. Students begin by completing a "Cinema Cop Profile" based on images of police from TV and movies, followed by class discussion on how law enforcement is represented in different film and television genres, and whether or not these representations reflect reality. A "Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt" provides students with an opportunity to research the ways in which police have historically been portrayed in film.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate:

- an awareness of the media's role in molding their perceptions of law enforcement officers
- an understanding of the gap that exists between the media's portrayal of policing and real life law enforcement
- an appreciation of the ways in which Hollywood has portrayed law enforcement from the 1920s to the present

## Preparation and Materials

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*Showing an old gangster or detective movie would be an interesting start to this unit. Check your school's video library for available films.*

*The resource links on the right sidebar also provide excellent background resources.*

Photocopy:

- Cinema Cop Profile
- Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt
- Scavenger Hunt Answers

(Arrange for library time and reserve resources for the scavenger hunt assignment.)



## Procedure

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### Guided Discussion

Historically, entertainment media have not been noted for accuracy in their portrayal of the lives of police officers. Yet when most of us think of cops, we think of the cops we see on TV and in the movies.

Distribute the Cinema Cop Profile to students and ask them to create a profile of a "cinema cop" based on the images of police that they have seen in movies and on TV. Once students have completed their profiles, create a Master profile on the blackboard, based on their work.

Ask your students:

- What types of police work aren't shown in TV and movies? *Police duties such as writing tickets, community policing, filling out reports and forms, traffic duties, etc. are seldom shown on TV.*
- What about reality-based cop shows like "Cops", "Rescue 911" and "America's Most Wanted"? Do these shows give us a more balanced view of police work?
- How is the filming of reality-based shows different from that of regular police dramas?

Live, "on-the-scene" locations are featured; hand-held cameras are used to film the action; editing is sometimes choppy; a narrator's voice-over often guides the viewer through the action; the camera crew literally follows the police as they go about their duties; these shows feature real victims, criminals and police.

- What is the effect of this sort of filming technique on the viewer?

Let's take a look at the types of crimes cop shows deal with:

- Judging by these programs, what three crimes do you think are the most common?

Violent crimes are most common in television crime. However, according to Ontario Provincial Police statistics, violent crime occupies only 12% of total offences, property crime (at 51%) being the most common criminal offence. According to 1998 Statistics Canada information, the average police officer in Canada deals with only 47 criminal code incidents a year, excluding traffic offences.

- What percentage of crimes is solved in police shows? Most crimes on television are solved. In real life, approximately 80% of murders are solved, and only 20% of burglaries. In TV and films, criminals are sent to prison far more than they are in real life.
- What about the police force? What attitudes toward policing seem to be held by Hollywood writers?
- Create a list of "police myths" based on cop shows and movies. *(For example, reality-based crime shows feed the myth that police cannot solve crimes without the public's involvement. Some prime-time police dramas imply that cops who "follow the book" can't solve crime effectively.)* Discuss these myths.



## Activity

The Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt is an opportunity for students to explore the history of the ways in which police have been portrayed on film. High school students should be able to complete their hunt in the school library, using resources such as books on history, popular culture, television or film, almanacs, encyclopedias and, if available, the Internet or CD Roms. (Teachers may want to discuss this project with their school's teacher-librarian prior to assigning it, in order to reserve relevant materials.)

Younger students may need a couple of days to complete this assignment. Along with library and Internet resources, parents and older siblings (who may be more familiar with these programs and movies) may be a good source of information.

Excellent sources of information on the Internet include Dr. Greek's lectures; the "Film History by Decade" Web site; and John Blaser's "Film Noir and the Hard-Boiled Detective Hero" (links to these resources appear on the right sidebar of this page).

To begin the hunt:

- Divide the class into teams of four or five students.
- Distribute the Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt to team members.
  - Review scavenger hunt guidelines:
  - Team members fill in their own sheets, but each team will submit only one sheet for the final tally.
  - Students will receive one mark for each correct point.
  - Watch out for double-point questions. (For example, question 3 is worth two marks: one for identifying the Hayes Production Code, and another for answering why it was implemented.)
  - Team sheets must be submitted within the allotted time.
  - A bonus mark will be awarded to the first team to submit a sheet with the most correct and completed answers. (For example, if the second team to submit its sheet has more correct answers than the first team, it gets the bonus mark.)

Once the hunt has been completed, discuss the answers with students. For the questions that relate to types of cop shows from previous decades, have students consider how the genre has evolved, and the similarities and differences between today's cop shows and their predecessors.

## Evaluation

Completed Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt forms.



## Cinema Cop Profile

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Create a profile of a cinema cop based on characters from movies and TV. Be sure to include:

1. Your police officer's name, sex, and age

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2. A physical description

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3. Where your police officer works

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4. The types of crime he or she deals with

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5. A "personality" profile - what's this person like?

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## Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt

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As a team, gather as much information as possible in the time allotted. The team that finishes first - with the most answers completed correctly - wins the hunt!

1. Who were the *Keystone Cops*? (1)
2. What does the term *Film Noir* mean? (1)
3. What was the *Hayes Production Code*, and why was it implemented? (2)
4. List three famous *Gangster Films* from the 1930s. (3)
5. Who was the head of the FBI during the 1930s? How is he connected to police films? (2)
6. List the famous detective played by Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. (1)
7. How did the 1948 neo-documentary film *The Naked City* portray police work? (1)



8. List three television cop shows from the 1960s and describe how each portrayed police. (i.e. 'tough' cops, 'rebel' cops, 'sexy' cops, etc.) (6)
  
9. List three television cop shows from the 1970s and 1980s and describe how each portrayed police. (6)
  
10. The term "Vigilante Cop" describes someone who defies authority and breaks all the rules to solve crime. List three "Vigilante Cop" movies. (3)
  
11. Recently, reality-based and re-enactment cop shows have become very popular. List three of these shows. (3)
  
12. Connect the famous cinema cop or title to the appropriate actor or actress. (13)
 

a. Philip Marlowe	1. Gillian Anderson
b. Sam Spade	2. Clint Eastwood
c. Dirty Harry	3. Sharon Gless
d. Popeye Doyle	4. Jim Carey
e. Serpico	5. Jimmy Smits
f. Columbo	6. Farah Fawcett
g. Dana Scully	7. Peter Falk
h. Police Woman	8. Angie Dickenson
i. The Mod Squad	9. Gene Hackman
j. Charlie's Angels	10. Peggy Lipton
k. NYPD Blue	11. Al Pacino
l. Ace Ventura	12. Humphrey Bogart
m. Cagney and Lacey	13. Dick Powell

**Bonus Question: Name a Canadian Cop Show! (3)**



## Cinema Cop Scavenger Hunt Answer Sheet

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As a team, gather as much information as possible in the time allotted. The team that finishes first - with the most answers completed correctly - wins the hunt!

1. **Who were the *Keystone Cops*? (1)**

One of the silent screen's first images of police - the *Keystone Cops* were a comic, inept group of bumbling police officers.

2. **What does the term *Film Noir* mean? (1)**

*Film Noir* refers to a style of detective film that was popular in the 1940s. It was literally, "black film," using dark lighting and shadow (remember, they were filmed in black and white!) to create an atmosphere of gloom and suspense as the film's world-weary anti-hero fought crime. These films counted on suspense, rather than action, to keep an audience's attention.

3. **What was the *Hayes Production Code*, and why was it implemented? (2)**

The *Hayes Production Code* was a voluntary code implemented by Hollywood in 1934 to control the glorifying of the criminal and the accompanying violence in gangster films like those in Answer #4. The code stipulated that "crime could not pay" in the movies, and it remained in place until 1960!

4. **List three famous *Gangster Films* from the 1930s. (3)**

Three of the most famous gangster films from the 1930s include: *Little Caesar*, *The Public Enemy*, and *Scarface: The Shame of a Nation*. In these films, gangsters were portrayed as controlling society, the police either ineffectual or not included at all.

5. **Who was the head of the FBI during the 1930s? How is he connected to police films? (2)**

J. Edgar Hoover was the head of the FBI during this period. He was instrumental in changing police stereotypes by creating a positive image of FBI agents as law enforcers in films such as *"G" Men*.

6. **List the famous detective played by Humphrey Bogart in *The Maltese Falcon*. (1)**

Sam Spade

7. **How did the 1948 neo-documentary film *The Naked City* portray police work? (1)**

*The Naked City* attempted to portray police work in a realistic manner - right down to the more tedious duties like paperwork and record-keeping. It became the prototype for 1960s TV series like *Dragnet*.

8. **List three television cop shows from the 1960s and describe how each portrayed police. (i.e. 'tough' cops, 'rebel' cops, 'sexy' cops, etc.) (6)**

The classic 1960s cop show would have to be *Dragnet*, with its emphasis on "(white) model cops who get their man." *Adam-12* and *Highway Patrol* also followed this formula. Towards the late 1960s the face of TV police began to change, with shows like *The Mod Squad* which featured three funky young people (including one female and one black member) who were recruited to fight crime after they had run into trouble with the law themselves. *The Rookies* featured television's first uniformed black officer and *Ironside* featured a detective hero in a wheelchair.



9. **List three television cop shows from the 1970s and 1980s and describe how each portrayed police. (6)**  
Shows like *Miami Vice* offered a violent, rock video image of cops as brutalizers. *Cagney and Lacey* was applauded as one of the few television shows to realistically portray female police officers. (Compared to *Police Woman*, which featured Angie Dickenson fighting crime in skin-tight clothes and high heels.) *Hill Street Blues* was one of the first group-based crime dramas, interweaving several stories into the series, and using an ensemble cast. *Chips and Police Story* also followed this style. *Columbo* depicted a ruffled, low-key homicide lieutenant whose rambling manner hid a razor-sharp mind. *Hawaii Five-0* was the longest continuous-run police series in television history, airing from September 1968 to April 1980. Sci-fi policing can be seen in the *Bionic Man* and the *Bionic Woman*.
10. **The term "Vigilante Cop" describes someone who defies authority and breaks all the rules to solve crime. List three "Vigilante Cop" movies. (3)**  
Possible choices include: *Dirty Harry* and any of its sequels: *Magnum Force* (1973), *The Enforcer* (1976), *Sudden Impact* (1983), and *The Dead Pool* (1988) - *The French Connection*, *Serpico*, *Robocop*, *Blade Runner* and *Lethal Weapon*. Students might also include "vigilante justice" films like the *Batman* and *Terminator* series
11. **Recently, reality-based and re-enactment cop shows have become very popular. List three of these shows. (3)**  
*Cops*, *Top Cops*, *America's Most Wanted*, *Rescue 911*, *Unsolved Mysteries*
12. **Connect the famous cinema cop or title to the appropriate actor or actress. (13)**
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|---------------------|---------------------|
| a. Philip Marlowe   | 13. Dick Powell     |
| b. Sam Spade        | 12. Humphrey Bogart |
| c. Dirty Harry      | 2. Clint Eastwood   |
| d. Popeye Doyle     | 9. Gene Hackman     |
| e. Serpico          | 11. Al Pacino       |
| f. Columbo          | 7. Peter Falk       |
| g. Dana Scully      | 1. Gillian Anderson |
| h. Police Woman     | 8. Angie Dickenson  |
| i. The Mod Squad    | 10. Peggy Lipton    |
| j. Charlie's Angels | 6. Farah Fawcett    |
| k. NYPD Blue        | 5. Jimmy Smits      |
| l. Ace Ventura      | 4. Jim Carey        |
| m. Cagney and Lacey | 3. Sharon Gless     |

**Bonus Question: Name a Canadian Cop Show! (3)**

For a listing of current Canadian police-based shows, have students look at the program listings on the websites for Canadian television stations. Previous Canadian cop shows include *Forever Knight*, *Sirens*, *Sweating Bullets*, *Fly by Night*, *Wojeck*, *The Collaborators*, *Sidestreets* and *Night Heat*.

**Total possible points: 45**

