



THEMATIC COURSE TITLE:

SINATRA CINEMA: FEATURING FRANK'S FABULOUS FILMS

STUDENT LEVEL: 8th – 12th Grades (Period 5?)

TEACHER: Ms. Coffin, History and Language Arts

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This film course will discuss Frank Sinatra's successful career in Hollywood from the 1940s to the 1960s. Sinatra's film and musical credits are quite remarkable. He acted in 64 films, produced 9, directed 2, and was featured in 170 documentaries and television specials. Known as "The Voice" of the 20th century, Sinatra also was featured on 332 soundtracks and made over 70 albums. In 1953, Sinatra won an Academy Award as Best Supporting Actor for his role in the film, *From Here to Eternity*, as well as being given the Academy's Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award in 1970, and the American's Cinema Lifetime Achievement award in 1992. He also won 11 Grammy Awards for his distinctive singing style and interpretation of song lyrics.

In his early Hollywood years, Sinatra became recognized as a talented song and dance man. He was a quick study under the tutelage of Gene Kelly and shared the stage with tough guy, Marlon Brando, and fellow crooner, Bing Crosby. We will begin the film course by looking at Sinatra's most popular musicals—*On the Town*, *Guys and Dolls*, and *High Society*.

Sinatra was also eager to establish himself a dramatic actor. As early as 1953, he used his Hollywood contacts to land the role of Angelo Maggio in *From Here to Eternity*. He delivered an Oscar-worthy performance as a soldier who repeatedly challenges his sadistic sergeant to match quips and punches. Within two years, Sinatra delivered a believable performance as a heroine addict in *The Man with the Golden Arm*. This controversial role earned Sinatra another Academy Award nomination but this time as Best Actor in a Leading Role. Sinatra continued to give powerful leading performances in such political and war dramas as *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962) and *Von Ryan's Express* (1965).

Sinatra was equally effective at tempering his dramatic side as a fedora-wearing swinger and criminal. During the 60s, Sinatra made several light-hearted films with his Rat Pack co-stars Dean Martin, Sammy Davis Jr., Peter Lawford, Joey Bishop, and only female member, Shirley MacLaine. The class will watch the 1960 Las Vegas heist film, *Ocean's 11* (remade with George Clooney, Brad Pitt, and Matt Damon in 2001) and the 1964 *Robin and the 7 Hoods*, set in the heart of Chicago's gangster era of Prohibition. By the late 1960s, Sinatra returned to a more serious role as a jaded private eye in the films *Tony Rome* and *Lady in Cement*.

The objective of the film course is to discuss Frank Sinatra's acting talent, versatility and mastery of multiple cinema genres. The course will provide biographical information about Sinatra along with historical information about Hollywood during the first half of the 20th century. The goal of the course is to hone students' skills in analyzing and writing about visual media. Homework is assigned *almost daily*. Approximately 15 to 20 minutes of a feature film is usually screened each class. After students watch the daily segment, I provide a series of discussion points about the actor's choices to help students analyze or critique the film's use of camera angles, sound design, storyline, setting, character development, lighting, genre, and more. These assignments often lead to lively class discussions and improvement in writing skills.