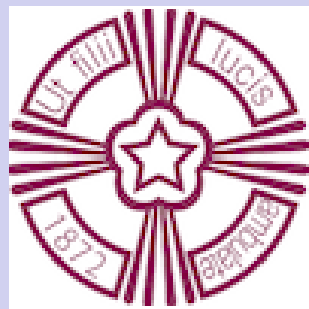


Teaching About Depictions of Japanese in Movies Through Presentations

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Introduction:

Depictions of Japanese in films provides a rich world of material that can help students to think deeply about films, history, identity, and race. For several years, the presenter had the opportunity to teach a class called “Japan and World Cinema” at a university in Japan, and students created presentations on an individual film and its depiction of Japanese people, a presentation comparing a Japanese film and a remake, and a presentation looking at a particular issue concerning depictions of Japanese in films across multiple movies.



Analysis of a depiction of Japan in a foreign film

In this presentation, students looked at a particular foreign (non-Japanese) film and looked for three ways in which that movie depicted Japanese people or Japan itself. Students were given explanations about certain patterns of stereotypes that often appear in films with depictions of Japan, such as the submissive Japanese woman or Japan-as-weird-world, and students looked to see what they noticed in the movies, positive and negative. They had to identify three aspects for their presentations.

Most common problem: The difference between analysis and description

Suggested films: Lost in Translation, You Only Live Twice, Railway Man, Fist of Legend, The Admiral: Roaring Currents, The Wolverine, John Rabe



Comparing an original Japanese film with a remake

In this presentation, students were required to compare usually a Japanese film with a remake made abroad—though foreign films remade in Japan are also possible. Students are asked to find differences in each film and try to explain why those differences might have been made based on cultural distinctions—such as the stronger feminism in the USA influencing stronger female characters in remakes of Japanese horror films, or a focus on realism and the popularity of *Jurassic Park* influencing the remake of *Godzilla* from 1998.

Students worked in pairs, or small groups, one person for each film. PPT presentation

Common issues: Difficulty with context, spending too much time describing the story, too much focus on new movies

Recommendations: Yojimbo/A Fistful of Dollars; Seven Samurai/The Magnificent Seven; Ghost in the Shell/Ghost in the Shell; Death Note/Death Note; Shall we Dance?/Shall We Dance?; Hachiko/Hachi: A Dog's Tale; Midnight Sun/Midnight Sun, Godzilla/Godzilla



Issues in Cinema Poster

For this presentation, students were put in groups to analyze a common issue or topic concerning the depiction of Japan or Japanese people across multiple movies and create a poster about what they found. Students could choose pre-selected topics or find their own original topics. Students did presentations on topics such as: yellow face; Japanese speak poor English; Japanese characters in superhero films; Japanese-foreigner romances; depictions of Japanese in WWII; depictions of Yakuza in foreign films and in Japanese films.

Because the presentation is open, students sometimes had difficulty finding specific details to discuss. The teacher needs to be familiar with the films under discussion so that guidance can be given to the students on any issue or movie.

Note that WWII topics are difficult, but very eye-opening for students and can be very meaningful. Looking beyond just films from the USA can also add a lot of context and flavor, such as South Korean films and Chinese films and their perspectives on Japanese history. Some of the best feedback received on the class was from students who looked at these issues.

Conclusion: Students often do not think deeply about movies and cultural and racial representation, and these activities gave students deep, meaningful chances to discuss movies from all over the world in a safe environment.