

Hollywood Movies About the Branches of Government

The branches of the U.S. government have been the focus of much-watched and highly influential Hollywood movies. In these activities, you will critically evaluate how political films portray the roles of each branch of the government and then design a movie trailer for your own political film.

Hollywood movies about U.S. political history tell viewers as much about the times in which the films were made as the historical stories shown on the screen. *Dr. Strangelove* (1964) expresses fears of nuclear war during the Cold War. *All the President's Men* (1976) shows courageous reporters uncovering government scandals and secrets. *Rambo* (1982) extolls the power of American heroes in the post-Vietnam War era. *Malcolm X* (1992) reflected a growing awareness of the need for racial and social justice in society.

Check out this list of [24 Great Political Movies about Government and Civics](#) as a starting point.

Or consult the [25 Greatest Legal Movies](#) according to the American Bar Association.

What are your favorite movies about government? It is the story you like; the characters and/or the actors who play them, or what the film says about the role of government in people's lives?



[Watch on YouTube](#)

Activity 1: Analyze Political Films About the Branches of the Government

- View a political film from Hollywood about each branch of the government.
 - Examples:
 - **Congress:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* (1939) celebrates the ideal of a single man of principle making a difference in politics.
 - **President:** *Lincoln* (2012) shows presidential leadership in getting Congress to enact the 13th Amendment to permanently abolish slavery or *All the President's Men* (1976) and its depiction of the Watergate coverup.
 - **Courts:** *12 Angry Men* (1957) shows a jury struggling with a life and death decision to convict a defendant.
- Use the [Teacher and Student Guide to Analyzing Movies](#) to explore and ask critical questions about the content and the power behind the construction of the content of each film.
- Then, consider:
 - How do the films portray the roles of each branch of the government?
 - What is 'accurate,' and what is altered?
 - Why might certain historical elements be altered?
 - Whose perspective is dominant? Whose perspective is missing?
 - What message does the film convey to viewers about how government works?
- Based on your analysis, **re-design a movie poster** for one of the films to showcase your findings.

Designing for Learning: Student-Created Activity Example

[Analyze Political Films](#) by Maria Ferrtti and Daniel Corbett

Activity 2: Design a Movie Trailer for Your own Political Film

- Watch one or more films from the following resources for inspiration:
 - [The 34 best political movies ever made](#), The Washington Post
 - [The 22 Best Political Movies Ever, Ranked](#), Insider (November 3, 2020)
 - [A Guide to Some of the Best Political Movies](#), The Colorado Sun (February 14, 2020)
- Review this article: [How to Make a Movie Trailer that Grabs Attention](#).
- Then, **design a movie trailer** for a new film that explores the separation of powers between the three branches of the government.
- Consider:
 - What issues would your film address?
 - What role will each branch of the government play in the film?
 - What perspectives would you explore in the film?
 - Why would people want to come to watch your film?
 - Who would be the actors in your film?

Additional Resources

- [Americans' Civics Knowledge Increases But Still Has a Long Way to Go](#)
- [Political Funny: Name the three branches of government](#) (YouTube)
- [Understanding Branches of Power Game](#) (iCivics)

Connecting to the Building Democracy for All eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Federalism and the Branches of the Government](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Distinguish the three branches of the government (separation of powers).* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Science) [8.T3.1]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Digital Citizen
 - 2c: Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3b: Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data, or other resources.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for the intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Ethics and Laws (CAS.b)
 - Interpersonal and Societal Impact (CAS.c)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.8
- [English/Language Arts Common Core Standards](#)



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