

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

### Introduction to Component 1 Section A:

**Two** Hollywood films will be studied for comparison, **one** chosen from **group 1** and **one** chosen from **group 2**:

#### Group 1: Classical Hollywood (1930-1960)

- Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942), U
- The Lady from Shanghai (Welles, 1947), PG
- Johnny Guitar (Ray, 1954), PG
- Vertigo (Hitchcock, 1958), PG
- Some Like It Hot (Wilder, 1959), 12

#### Group 2: New Hollywood (1961-1990)

- Bonnie and Clyde (Penn, 1967), 15
- One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (Forman, 1975), 15
- Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1979), 15
- Blade Runner (Scott, 1982), 15\*
- Do the Right Thing (Lee, 1989), 15.

**\*Learners study Blade Runner in the Director's Cut version, released 1992.**

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

## Core Study Areas

Learners will study all of their chosen films (eleven films in total) in relation to the following core study areas.

- Area 1. The key elements of film form: cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing,
- Area 2. Meaning and response: how film functions as both a medium of representation and as an aesthetic medium
- Area 3. The contexts of film: social, cultural, political, historical and institutional, including production.

## The Specialist Study Area is Auteur Theory

This guide will focus on debates and examples of auteurs in Hollywood 1930-1990.

The idea of the auteur as a critical approach derives from an earlier period of Film Studies when critics aimed to demonstrate that films are 'authored' by individuals, most obviously the film's director, rather than being generic products. Today, the concept of the auteur can be applied to a film or group of films in order to identify and explain its distinctive characteristics, arguing that these derive from a principal creative individual (most commonly the director, but it may also include cinematographers, performers or institutions).

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

Learners study the following:

- how auteurs determine the look and style of a film in relation to the collaborative approach to film production within Hollywood cinema
- how auteurs, through the imprint of their 'signature' features, can make a significant impact on a film's messages and values.

In relation to the idea of the auteur in Hollywood 1930 – 1990 learners will examine the work of filmmakers within the context of the Hollywood film institution. Learners should consider:

- To what extent it is possible to identify the distinctive contribution of creative individuals, most often directors, within a large industrial production process?
- How appropriate is it to talk about these individuals as auteurs?
- Is it more appropriate to consider filmmaking as a collaborative process?

This guide will look at theories about cinema and the work of a range of directors - as well as activities to engage learners - to answer the questions:

- What is an auteur?
- What are the arguments for and against auteur theory of a way of reading film?

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

## What is an auteur?

### Task One:

- What's your favourite film? Who directed it?
- Did the director also write or produce it?
- Have you seen any other films by the same director?
- What were some similarities in the narrative? Think about the plot and characters, or even the structure of the plot.
- What were some similarities in the genre (or use of different genres)?

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

#### Task One:

- *What were some similarities in the film style? Think about cinematography, sound, editing and mise-en-scène.*
- *What were some similarities in the films' themes - did they deal with similar issues or questions?*
- *Would you be able to tell this director's work from watching the first half hour of the film? What elements would you recognise?*
- *Thought: what are the differences between the director's films? Does each film seem entirely different in terms of themes, narrative, style etc.? Or are there a balance of similarities and differences?*

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

## Some ideas

**Narrative** - some directors focus on particular types of character and location. Spike Lee, director of films such as *Do The Right Thing* (1989) and *Jungle Fever* (1991), often features a range of characters from a diverse cultural and ethnic background, mainly in the 'melting pot' of New York City.

**Structure** - some directors like to play with traditional linear plot structure and tell their stories using flashbacks and forwards, ellipses (when key scenes are deliberately omitted), dream sequences etc. Quentin Tarantino in films like *Reservoir Dogs* (1992) and the *Kill Bill* films (2003-4) experiment with chronology to create suspense, excitement and mystery.

**Genre** - some directors make films in a similar genre and enjoy exploring the codes and conventions, often playing with these elements to challenge audience expectations. Christopher Nolan usually works within the sci-fi (or superhero) genre, but he usually adds psychological depth and complexity to even well-established characters like Batman and the Joker in *The Dark Knight* (2008). He has also worked in other genres such as psychological thriller in *Memento* (2000) and war film in *Dunkirk* (2017), where he has used disrupted timelines and other techniques to challenge the audience's expectations of film in these genres.

**Style** - some directors work in a range of different genres and feature a variety of characters and locations, but have 'signature' uses of aesthetic style. In films as diverse as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *Gladiator* (2000) Ridley Scott uses the latest technology to create immersive film environments. Often working as the producer, Scott is famous for controlling almost every element of the filmmaking process from camera to production design to music. His films are often fast-paced, and visually spectacular, with snappy editing and extensive use of digital effects.

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

**Theme** - some directors' films vary in style and genre, but they have consistent themes that they explore using different characters and situations. Milos Forman, influenced by his early career in Communist Czechoslovakia, often explores issues of personal freedom (*The People vs Larry Flynt*, 1996), social conformity (*One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, 1975) and the conflict between artistic individual and society (*Amadeus*, 1984)

#### Origins of auteur

The term auteur ('author' in French) was first used by Francois Truffaut in 1954 in the influential magazine *Cahiers du cinema* to describe directors who had a distinctive visual style and thematic concerns. Instead of films being identified by a studio, with directors and writers just part of the filmmaking machine (as was the case in Hollywood), the writers of the *Cahiers du cinema* celebrated the individual 'voice' of a director. They were reacting against what they called 'Scenarist' French films of the time which relied on literary classics for plot and had an unadventurous style. These writers went on to make their own films as part of the French New Wave. They used many Hollywood directors like Howard Hawks and Nicolas Ray, as well as Hitchcock, as their inspiration. Alexandre Astruc used the term 'camera pen' to describe directors who 'write' with film.

Ironically, it was experimentation with cinematography, editing and narrative by the French New Wave that went on to inspire the directors of the 'New Hollywood' of the 1970s to break the conventions of Classical Hollywood cinema.

## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

**Research Task:** *To what extent is your favourite director an auteur?  
What are all the films the director has made?*

*Watch the trailers: What similarities can you see between them? What differences?*

*Read some quality film criticism about the director or 3-4 individual films. To what extent do critics believe the director is an auteur?*

*Do they regularly work with other key creatives like writers, editors, designers, musicians? How much do these other creative roles contribute to the effect of the overall film?*



## Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 Comparative Study

### Specialist Study Area Introduction: Auteur

Some ideas for film criticism

<http://www.theyshootpictures.com>

<https://www.filmcomment.com/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/film>

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/>

**Debate Task:** “Movies are stories; and only writers can tell stories. So the wrong people are making movies” - Gore Vidal.

To what extent do you think films are the product of auteurs? To what extent do you think other key creative roles are just as much a film’s ‘author’, and movies are communal products?

Films are products of auteurs	Films are communal products