

Feature Films with Multicultural Themes

Movies with Meaning

Movies can help us understand people whose cultural background and family history may be very different than our own. Listed below are 13 popular films many of which are available at the Austin Public Library -- that introduce their audiences to some of the events, struggles, and stories that create cultural heritage.

Most of the 13 films are award-winning. Because some of them have serious subject matter, parents are encouraged to watch and discuss the movies with their children.

“Snow Falling on Cedars”

A dramatic mystery set near Seattle that addresses anti-Japanese American sentiment lingering in the U.S. after WWII (rated PG13).

“Anne Frank Remembered”

This film is a documentary about a young Jewish girl who, with her family, was hidden from the Nazis in Amsterdam during WWII (not rated, ages 10 and up).

“Simon Birch”

Set in New Hampshire in 1964, this is a direct, warm, and positive film about a young boy with Maroteaux-Lamy Syndrome (rated PG).

“To Kill a Mockingbird”

An adaptation of a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel about a Southern lawyer who defends a black man in a small racially divided town (not rated, ages 10 and up).

“Smoke Signals”

Billed as the first feature film written, directed, co-produced, and acted by Native Americans, Smoke Signals provides an insightful and humorous view of issues facing modern American Indians (rated PG-13).

“Hester Street”

Set in New York City in 1896, this film depicts an immigrant couple and the choices they make in the conflict between keeping their cultural heritage and becoming more "American" (rated PG).

“Gandhi”

A biography of Mahatma Gandhi that explores the cultural and religious history of India, colonialism, and the struggle for independence (rated PG).

“The Color Purple”

An uplifting movie about a woman growing up in the rural South in the early 20th century (rated PG13).

“The Emigrants”

The story of a young Swedish couple that immigrates to Minnesota in the 1850s and faces the physical and emotional hardships of pioneer life (rated PG).

“Glory”

Explores African American contributions to the Civil War through the story of the 54th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, a group of black soldiers made up of escaped slaves and Northern freemen (rated R).

“The Joy Luck Club”

This film samples the lives of four Chinese American women and their daughters, and explores some of the cultural and generational differences between them (rated R).

“Jakob the Liar”

The fictional story of a radio broadcaster who hopes to help the war effort during WWII through the information he broadcasts in a Nazi-occupied Polish city (rated PG-13).

“Amistad”

This film is based on the true story of a group of Africans who were brought to the U.S. on a slave ship in 1839 and overpowered their captors. Their case is argued before the U.S. Supreme Court by John Quincy Adams (rated R).