



OwlTeacher
Teaching with Movies & Literature

ROUGH RIDERS

Good for the following school subjects:

- ✓ American History
- ✓ The Spanish American War
- ✓ Imperialism

Directed by John Milius
1997; Rated NR; Action/Western; 240 minutes; Color;
Available from www.OwlTeacher.com bookstore

Synopsis: In 1898 the US government, led by a young Theodore Roosevelt, decides to intervene in Cuba's struggle for independence. They join the Cuban rebels and help them fight against Spanish rule. Full of energy and looking for action and adventure, Roosevelt leaves the security of his job as naval secretary and forms a volunteer cavalry regiment to fight in Cuba. Roosevelt's volunteer regiment becomes known as the "Rough Riders" and includes volunteer troops from all walks of life and from every part of America. Together, they battle against a stronger and more powerful opponent in one of the most inspiring victories in American history.

Educational Benefits of this movie: In 1898, the country was still rebuilding from the Civil War and it was also the beginning of the industrialized age. Many things were on the minds of Americans. In addition to previously mentioned, issues such as jingoism, American expansionism, imperialism, and yellow journalism were at the forefront. These are all important topics to be discussed in an American history class and this movie would add greatly to a unit on such topics. The movie portrays the man, Theodore Roosevelt, as he was: exuberant, funny, and down-to-earth. Students not only will get any understanding of the ideals and issues of the time period, they will get to know one of our greatest presidents thoroughly when he was still a very young man.

Historical Background: The origins of the Spanish American War were a combination of America's genuine concern for Spanish intervention in our hemisphere, and the growing political belief that in order to become a great power, America needed to expand its influence on our soil as well as in the Pacific. Theodore Roosevelt was appointed in charge of the forces that would fight in Cuba and help them achieve their independence. Formally named the 1st United States Volunteer Cavalry, these forces quickly became known as Teddy's Rough Riders. As soon as word spread that the colorful Roosevelt was looking for volunteers, the war office was swamped with requests to serve. 23,000 applied to ride with Teddy, about 2,000 were accepted. Once in Cuba, Spanish resistance was fierce, and a number of Rough Riders were killed and wounded. Together with the many other troops of the American force, the Rough Riders forced the surrender of the Santiago garrison on San Juan Hill, and the collapse of Spanish opposition in Cuba. Victory came at a heavy price, though. The Spanish in Cuba fought fiercely, and American blood flowed generously. However, Roosevelt and his fearless soldiers had proven their courage under fire.

Study Questions:

1. What was the general attitude of the American people towards the Rough Riders as they left to fight the Spanish-American war? Give specific examples from the movie to prove your answer.
2. Do you feel that the "yellow journalists" (reporters who went to Cuba to cover the war in the newspapers and usually exaggerated the stories) helped or hurt the situation during the war? Why?
3. Why was Henry Nash considered a hero? Do you think he intended to be heroic or was it an accident? Why?
4. How did the Rough Riders feel about killing the enemy? Give examples from the movie to support your answer.
5. What are some reasons that these men joined the Rough Riders? Use at least two of the men to give an example of your answer.
6. Choose one of the Rough Riders who especially appealed to you. Describe his personality. What were his weaknesses and what were his strengths. Why did you choose him?

Project:

Choose one of the following topics related to the Rough Riders and this unit in general:

- ✓ Yellow journalism
- ✓ The explosion of USS Maine
- ✓ The Arguments in FAVOR of Imperialism vs. the arguments AGAINST Imperialism.
- ✓ The Monroe Doctrine as it relates to Imperialism and American Expansionism
- ✓ The Spanish American War
- ✓ President William McKinley
- ✓ Compare & contrast Theodore Roosevelt with other members of government throughout history or other members of the Rough Riders
- ✓ The charge up San Juan Hill
- ✓ One member, any member of the Rough Riders
- ✓ The Platt Amendment
- ✓ The annexation of Hawaii
- ✓ The building of the Panama Canal
- ✓ The Great White Fleet

Research additional, detailed information about your topic and create a PowerPoint presentation to enlighten the rest of the class. Make sure you cite all of the sources you used and that your presentation is between 10 & 15 slides of good information. You may add music, song, and video clips to your PowerPoint. Include images as well. Present your PowerPoint in a professional manner, showing thorough understanding of the topic.