

Study Guide

Invictus



Feature movies are a medium, an art and a business. Each of these elements plays a role. As a medium, movies represent ideas through the codes and conventions of sound and moving image. As art, they make personal and cultural statements to their audiences. As businesses, they create work for their creators and profits for their investors and distributors.

This guide, which extends the ideas presented in *Invictus* episode of *Beyond the Screen*, may be used by teachers as they support their students, by parents who want to discuss the movie with their children, or by serious viewers who want to think beyond the screen.

Plot Synopsis: Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa, decides to use the upcoming Rugby World Cup games to re-define South Africa and encourage coloured and white South Africans to cooperate with one another as they build a new nation. During the process, he must diplomatically overcome challenges posed by his own African National Conference party, his security guards, his presidential staffers and the fact that the national team lacks international experience.

A. Cinematography

Most of the shots were taken from cameras on tripods or dollies, but when the game play was photographed, the cameras were hand held.

How do the hand-held camera shots help viewers feel the excitement of the games?

When else did you notice the use of hand-held cameras?

The Hawaii state government subsidized the production of *Hawaii Five-O*, a cops-and-robbers television series, because watching the show's beautiful scenes encouraged viewers to visit the islands. *Invictus* shows viewers many views of South Africa, including urban and rural locations. Based on what you saw, do you think you would like to visit South Africa? Why?

B. Editing

Parallel editing is used to add interest and excitement to *Invictus*. Parallel editing occurs when an editor cuts back and forth between two or more scenes, interrupting each scene with action from another scene. Even though they may not have been recorded at the same time, audiences usually interpret parallel edited scenes as events that occur simultaneously.

Parallel editing occurs early in *Invictus*, when viewers see Nelson Mandela and his security guards on an early morning walk. The scenes of the walkers are intercut with scenes of a van speeding through dark wet streets. Viewers can see neither the van's driver nor its passengers. Finally, the van roars past the walkers, and they react as though the van poses a mortal threat, ready to defend themselves. When the van passes them and stops up the street, a newspaper vender emerges with a bundle. It was a harmless moment, but it communicated the potential dangers and anxiety that Mandela faced.

Parallel editing is used very purposefully during the championship rugby game. Scenes and sounds were parallel edited between the TopSport sportscaster, fans in the stadium, fans in homes, fans in bars, security guards in the presidential box, the township boy listening with the security guards and Mandela sitting with the president of New Zealand.

How does this parallel editing help viewers understand the power and significance of the Rugby World Cup game?

C. Music

Music is used very purposefully in *Invictus*.

1. Drums play during each of the Springbok games. They are not military drums, but African drums.

How do the African drums help viewers understand the cultural significance of the games?

2. Viewers hear a trumpet rarely in *Invictus*. One moment a trumpet plays occurs when François Pienaar is in Mandela's cell. François closes the cell door and stretches his arms, measuring how small the cell is. He also peers onto Mandela's bed, and sees Mandela sitting in his prison uniform.

What is the effect of hearing a trumpet at this moment in the movie?

How might the trumpet music help viewers understand the importance of this moment in François' life?

D. Invictus Sub-plots

The major story arc of *Invictus* involves Nelson Mandela's attempts to use the Rugby World Cup games to bring coloured and white South Africans together as a nation. There are several related sub-plots that help viewers understand and appreciate Mandela's efforts.

1. How do François' Pienaar's experiences help viewers understand the difficulty of Mandela's dreams? Consider the following:
 - a) François' father expresses extreme cynicism about Mandela and the new South Africa. He cautions François about his future.
 - b) François meets with Mandela.
 - c) François conducts coaching sessions in the townships.
 - d) François and his teammates tour the Robben Island prison museum.
 - e) François includes the family's housekeeper in game tickets.
2. How do the actions of the township boy help viewers understand and appreciate the nation-building events? Consider the following:
 - a) The boy is offered a durable and comfortable Springbok jersey at a church clothing distribution. He declines the free gift.
 - b) The boy journeys to Ellis Field on game day.
 - c) The boy collects empty bottles near a security car that is tuned to a radio sportscast of the game.
 - d) The boy is shooed away by the security guards listening to the game on the security car radio.
 - e) The boy drinks a Coke while listening with the security guards.
 - f) The boy and the guards celebrate the Springbok victory together.

What other sub-plots did the movie use to help viewers understand and appreciate the events in *Invictus*?

E. Uses of Media Texts

A media text is any message communicated using a medium. There are many media texts in *Invictus*, including the poem, the two South African national anthems, the green and gold Springbok uniforms and the Robben Island prison museum. More traditional media texts are the television newscasts and sportscasts and newspaper articles. Consider how the story is often told through the uses of traditional and non-traditional media texts.

1. The Topsport commentator appears often.

When is his sportscast used to provide viewers with useful background information?

When is the sound-over of his sportscast used to provide continuity over many scenes? When is his sportscast used to explain the importance of the world cup games?

When is his sportscast used to reveal Mandela's strategies?

2. We see several newspaper pages.

What are the significances of the headlines viewers see, especially "Crime Rate Rising" and "Boks Hungry for Victory?"

3. During the final game, we see people singing the South African national anthem. Sometimes we see them singing at Ellis Field, but we also see them singing in other locations.

What is the significance of seeing the anthem on many screens, in different locations, sung by different people?

How might the television experience of the game and the anthem have influenced the people of South Africa?

F. Product Placement or Dramatic Recreation?

Product placement occurs when a company pays to have its product or logo displayed in a movie. Selling product placements is one way for movie producers to increase a movie's profit. There are many opportunities for product placement in movies: actors might wear or use a product; they might visit an identifiable location or speak about a specific product; signs displaying ads for a product might appear in a shot; and, product logos might appear on items appearing in shots.

1. Consider the clothing worn by the actors. Might any of it qualify as product placement?
2. Did any of the actors use items that were identifiable by brand name?
3. People watch rugby games and sportscasts often in *Invictus*. These scenes would be an opportunity to promote one brand of TV by displaying its company logo.

Did you notice a recognizable logo on any TVs?

4. The Lion Lager logo appears on the Springbok jerseys and jackets. The Lion Lager brand is no longer sold in South Africa.
5. Many advertisements appeared in the Ellis Field arena, including ads for Coke, VISA, Xerox, Famous Grouse, and SAA (South Africa Airways). Do you think these were product placements, or might they have been authentic reconstructions of ads that appeared during the original games?

What conclusions might you make about product placement in *Invictus*?

G. Choosing Titles

Invictus was based on the book *Playing The Enemy: Nelson Mandela And The Game That Changed a Nation*. The title of the book is very descriptive, and readers would know very well what kind of story it tells. 'Playing the Enemy' is also ambiguous, and might mean that Mandela was playing a game, with his enemies on the other team, or that he was playing apartheid-loving South Africans into willingly supporting the new nation. *Invictus* is a Latin word, meaning unconquered. *Invictus* is also the title of a poem that Mr. Mandela found inspirational while suffering his 27 years in prison. The poem reads:

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as a Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winc'd nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley

Which of the titles do you find more interesting? Why?

Which title helps you understand the theme of the story better?

How does changing the title from a focus on Nelson Mandela (*Playing The Enemy: Nelson Mandela And The Game That Changed a Nation*) to a focus on self-determination (*Invictus*) change the way that people might understand the story?

Why do you think the filmmakers changed the title?

Which title might be more interesting for Canadian viewers? Why?

H. Sports and Nationalism

Nelson Mandela conscientiously set out to make the Rugby World Cup more than a sporting event. He used the games to re-define the new South Africa.

What might have given him the idea of exploiting a sporting event to re-define nationalism?

Research the following sporting events and answer these questions:

How did the governments use the events to enhance or re-define a feeling of nationhood?

In what ways did the governments influence or modify the events?

How successfully did the events fulfill the governments' goals?

Berlin Olympics, 1936

Canada-Russia Summit Series, 1972

Moscow Olympics, 1980

Atlanta Olympics, 1996

Beijing Olympics, 2008

Vancouver Olympics, 2010

I. Movies and Politics

Invictus marks the second time Morgan Freeman has portrayed a South African prisoner. In *Power of One*, Freeman portrayed Geel Piet, a prison inmate who teaches a white boy to box. As a result of Geel Piet's kindness and influence, the boy grows into a model for a more equitable South Africa. Mr. Freeman made *Power of One* during the same period in which Mr. Mandela was freed and becoming South Africa's president.

How might the role of Geel Piet and Mr. Freeman's awareness of Mr. Mandela's activities have influenced Mr. Freeman's desire to make a movie about Nelson Mandela?

How might his experience portraying a South African prisoner in *Power of One* have influenced his portrayal of Nelson Mandela in *Invictus*?

J. A Clint Eastwood or Morgan Freeman Movie?

A common theme among Clint Eastwood's movies involves group building and sacrifice. Many of the characters that Eastwood portrays work to preserve and improve groups. An example of this theme and characterization comes from *Gran Torino*, where Walter Kowalski sacrificed himself to preserve the safety of the Hmong community. Morgan Freeman has portrayed a wide range of characters, from God to killers, often in supporting roles. He has appeared in Eastwood's *Million Dollar Baby* and *Unforgiven*. Freeman is an executive producer on *Invictus*, and was trying to develop a Nelson Mandela project for years before discovering *Playing the Enemy*. Eastwood is *Invictus*' director.

Based on what you know about each of the two men and the movie projects in which they have been involved, consider whether *Invictus* is more a Clint Eastwood movie or a Morgan Freeman movie. How might it be considered a suitable project for both artists?

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