

FILMS OR FILM SERIES' About the Experience of Slavery

SUITABLE FOR High School and Adults During Black History Month - February

Here is an alphabetical list of films which can be used to discuss the experience of slavery. We recommend careful selection for elementary children. And, in leading the discussion, we urge teachers to ask “What this film got right and what did it get wrong.” Every film listed is significant in some way. Each has some merits and each has some flaws.

| Film | Year | Description |
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| <i>12 Years a Slave</i> | 2013 | The film is based on the true story of Solomon Northup , a free black man who was kidnapped in Washington, D.C. in 1841 and sold into slavery. ^[6] |
| <i>500 Years Later</i> | 2005 | Documentary covering the onset of slavery , its subsequent colonialism , and how Africans are still struggling for basic freedom. |
| <i>The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn</i> | 1939 | Mark Twain's title character befriends and takes a raft down the Mississippi River with Jim , an escaped slave hoping to win his freedom. Later films of the book were also made in 1960 , 1973 (Soviet Union film Hopelessly Lost), 1974 , 1975 , 1976 (Japanese anime series), and 1993 . |
| <i>Aferim!</i> | 2015 | Tragic adventure comedy telling the story of a bounty hunter in pursuit of a Romani (Gypsy) slave in 1835 Wallachia. |
| <i>Alex Haley's Queen</i> | 1993 | Based on the life of Queen Jackson Haley, Alex Haley's paternal grandmother. |
| <i>Amazing Grace</i> | 2006 | Amazing Grace is a biographical movie about the Abolitionist William Wilberforce's campaign against the slave trade in the British Empire, ^[7] and features the role of John Newton , the writer of the hymn Amazing Grace , in Wilberforce's campaign. |
| <i>Amistad</i> | 1997 | In 1839 a slave revolt takes place on the Spanish ship La Amistad which is heading to Cuba . Two white survivors are ordered to navigate the ship back to Africa, but navigate the ship to the United States instead. The slaves then have to fight for their freedom in court, where they are eventually defended by ex-U.S. president John Quincy Adams . ^[8] |
| <i>Band of Angels</i> | 1957 | Love story set around the US Civil War in which a plantation owner with a past raises a black slave as his son and buys a posh mixed race slave girl. ^[9] |

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| <i>Belle</i> | 2013 | In the 1700s, a mixed-race girl falls in love with a man fighting for slave emancipation. ^[6] |
| <i>Beloved</i> | 1998 | A former slave experiences flashbacks to her past as a slave. ^[8] |
| <i>Ben-Hur</i> | 1925 & 1959 | A first century Jewish prince is forced to become a galley slave . |
| <i>The Birth of a Nation</i> | 1915 | The film portrays blacks in a racist manner. The Root magazine wrote, "The film dramatizes the rise of the Ku Klux Klan as "saviors" of a civil society, and the main black characters are played by whites in blackface." ^[8] |
| <i>The Book of Negroes</i> | 2015 | A Canadian television series based on the book of the same name. |
| <i>Boy Slaves</i> | 1939 | An exposé of child labor. Children entrapped in peonage strike for better food, try to alert the government, but fail in these attempts. |
| <i>Brother Future</i> | 1991 | Brother Future is a science fiction movie. A street kid from Detroit, Michigan, is hit by a car, and when he awakes he finds himself a slave in South Carolina in 1822. The boy then has to help his fellow slaves so that he can return to his own time. |
| <i>Burn!</i> | 1969 | An agent provocateur is sent to the fictional island of Queimada, a Portuguese colony in the Caribbean to replace the Portuguese administration by a formally sovereign state controlled by white latifundists friendly to Great Britain. To realize this project, the agent persuades the black slaves to fight for their liberation from slavery. |
| <i>C.S.A.: The Confederate States of America</i> | 2004 | A faux British documentary of today reviewing American history, operating under the counter-historical premise that the Confederate States of America won the American Civil War , annexed all of the United States in the process, and thereby preserved and expanded slavery throughout the nation. |
| <i>Django Unchained</i> | 2012 | In the American South in 1858 a slave is purchased by a German dentist turned bounty hunter , and then agrees to help him track down a small group of dangerous outlaws in exchange for his freedom and the rescuing of his wife from a cruel plantation owner. |
| <i>Drum</i> | 1976 | The film, a sequel to Mandingo , features a black slave who falls in love with a plantation owner's daughter. When the owner threatens castration, the slave plans a revolt. ^[8] |

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| <i>El Cimarron</i> | 2007 | Based on the life of Marcos Xiorro who conspired and planned a slave revolt in Puerto Rico in 1821. |
| <i>Enslavement: The True Story of Fanny Kemble</i> | 2000 | The film depicts the story of British actress and abolitionist Fanny Kemble , who becomes horrified by the treatment of her husband's enslaved people . Fanny later publishes her journals and their first-hand accounts of slavery, helping influence the British government's decision to withhold support of the Confederacy during the American Civil War . ^{[10][11]} |
| <i>Fiddlers Three</i> | 1944 | |
| <i>The Foxes of Harrow</i> | 1947 | Covering approximately the years 1827–1837, an illegitimate son of an Irish aristocratic family comes to America. He is a gambler and scoundrel who acquires a large plantation with many slaves, and builds an empire in antebellum New Orleans . The movie was the first based upon a book written by an African-American writer. ^[8] |
| <i>Frederick Douglass and the White Negro</i> | 2008 | A documentary telling the story of ex-slave, abolitionist , writer and politician Frederick Douglass and his escape to Ireland from America in the 1840s. |
| <i>Ganga Zumba</i> | 1963 | Not released until 1972 because of a military coup in Brazil, the film highlights Ganga Zumba , a 17th-century slave revolutionary. |
| <i>Gladiator</i> | 2000 | A Roman general in the 2nd century A.D. is turned into a slave who must fight for his life, and his country, as a gladiator . |
| <i>Glory</i> | 1989 | During the American Civil War an escaped slave joins an all-black fighting unit of the Union Army . ^[8] |
| <i>Goodbye Uncle Tom</i> | 1971 | <i>Addio Zio Tom</i> is a pseudo-documentary in which the filmmakers go back in time and visit antebellum America, using period documents to examine, in graphic detail, the racist ideology and degrading conditions faced by Africans under slavery. ^[8] |
| <i>Gone with the Wind</i> | 1939 | The film features a slave nursemaid as a prominent supporting character; the actress Hattie McDaniel made history by winning an Academy Award for her performance. ^[8] |
| <i>I Am Slave</i> | 2010 | A U.K. television story of one woman's fight for freedom from modern-day slavery, based on the experience of Mende Nazer , a British author, human rights activist, and a former slave in Sudan . |

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| <i>Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom</i> | 1984 | In the film, enslaved children are forced to mine for Sankara stones. |
| <i>Jefferson in Paris</i> | 1995 | The film shows the relationship between Thomas Jefferson , who was one of the Founding Fathers of the United States and a slave owner, and Sally Hemings , a black slave. ^[8] |
| <i>Joseph</i> | 1995 | The biblical story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is an Egyptian slave who earns a reputation as an interpreter of dreams. |
| <i>Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat</i> | 1999 | Joseph's biblical story, portrayed in a musical by Andrew Lloyd Webber , starred Donny Osmond as Joseph. |
| <i>The Journey of August King</i> | 1995 | A widowed farmer reluctantly provides safe passage to a run-away slave as he returns home from an annual trip to purchase provisions and supplies, starring Jason Patric as August King and Thandie Newton as Annalees. |
| <i>The Keeping Room</i> | 2014 | The film takes place during the American Civil War . Three women in the South have to protect their home against soldiers of the Union Army . ^[6] |
| <i>The Last Supper</i> | 1976 | A plantation owner during Spanish colonial times recreates the last supper using slaves, in order to teach them about Christianity . |
| <i>The Legend of Nigger Charley</i> | 1972 | The blaxploitation film takes place in America in the Antebellum South . It follows three slaves seeking their freedom. ^[12] |
| <i>Lincoln</i> | 2012 | Near the end of the American Civil War , President Abraham Lincoln pushes to abolish slavery in the U.S. by urging Congress to pass the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution . ^[8] |
| <i>Manderlay</i> | 2005 | Set in the early 1930s, the film tells the story of Grace, an idealist who attempts to oust the owners of a plantation in Alabama and free the slaves living there. |
| <i>Mandingo</i> | 1975 | On a plantation in 19th-century United States, the owner sleeps with a young slave. Another slave sleeps with the owner's wife in payback, and things escalate. ^[8] |
| <i>Motherland</i> | 2010 | Documentary sequel to 500 Years Later , the film gives an overview of the history of the African continent and its people from Ancient Egypt to the present. |
| <i>North and South</i> | 1985–1994 | A three-part TV miniseries outlining the period leading to and during the American civil war, and the post-war Reconstruction . |

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| <u>The North Star</u> | 2013 | The film is based on "the true story of Big Ben Jones, a slave who escaped from a Southern plantation in 1848 and is helped by local <u>Quakers</u> ". ^[6] |
| <u>Passage du milieu</u> | 1999 | <u>Docudrama</u> about a <u>trans-Atlantic slave ship</u> voyage of black slaves from the West Coast of Africa to the Caribbean, a part of the <u>triangular slave trade</u> route called the <u>Middle Passage</u> . |
| <u>Prince Among Slaves</u> | 2006 | a <u>PBS</u> historical documentary about the life of <u>Abdulrahman Ibrahim Ibn Sori</u> , a prince from West Africa who was made a slave in the United States and freed 40 years later on orders of the American president, <u>John Quincy Adams</u> . |
| <u>The Prince of Egypt</u> | 1998 | Prince <u>Moses</u> frees the Hebrew slaves from the <u>Pharaoh</u> of <u>Egypt</u> . |
| <u>Quilombo</u> | 1984 | account of <u>Quilombo dos Palmares</u> , a 17th-century Brazilian community of escaped slaves. Features its one-time leader, <u>Zumbi</u> . |
| <u>Return of the Jedi</u> | 1983 | <u>Princess Leia</u> is briefly enslaved by <u>Jabba the Hutt</u> . ^[13] |
| <u>Roots</u> | 1977 | An acclaimed eight-episode TV mini-series based on <u>Alex Haley</u> 's biography about his family moving from slavery to liberation. ^[8] |
| <u>Roots: The Gift</u> | 1988 | A film portraying events occurring between the second and third episodes of the first miniseries. |
| <u>Sankofa</u> | 1993 | In the supernatural film, a black American model travels to <u>Ghana</u> and is transported back in time by a local mystic. The model finds herself a slave in the past. ^[8] |
| <u>Santa Fe Trail</u> | 1940 | Western centered around abolitionist <u>John Brown</u> , his attacks on slavery as a prelude to the Civil War, and the attempt to find his hideout and stop his violent campaign. |
| <u>Savannah</u> | 2013 | Loosely based on the book <i>Ducks, Dogs and Friends</i> , the film is about a white hunter who befriends a freed slave. ^[6] |
| <u>The Slave Hunters</u> | 2010 | Slave hunter goes after an escaped General-turned-slave in this South Korean 24-episode television series. |
| <u>Slaves</u> | 1969 | Follows the life of two slaves in the American South of the 1850s. |
| <u>Solomon Northup's Odyssey</u> | 1984 | The film is based on the true story of <u>Solomon Northup</u> , a free black man who was kidnapped in <u>Washington, DC</u> in 1841 and sold into slavery. ^[14] |
| <u>Something Whispered</u> | 2013 | In the United States in the 1850s, a black man attempts to free his family from a tobacco plantation. ^[6] |

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| <i>Spartacus</i> | 1960 & 2004 | In Spartacus , a film that stays close to the historical record, ^[15] a Thracian enslaved as a gladiator by the Roman Republic leads a slave revolt that engulfs much of the Italian peninsula. |
| <i>Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace</i> | 1999 | Anakin Skywalker is enslaved by Watto until Qui-Gon Jinn wins his freedom in a wager. |
| <i>Tamango</i> | 1958 | A slave ship crosses the Atlantic, and the slaves rebel. A film by Hollywood blacklisted director John Berry starring Dorothy Dandridge and Curd Jürgens . |
| <i>The Ten Commandments</i> | 1956 | Biblical story of the life of Moses , an adopted Egyptian prince who becomes the deliverer of his real brethren, the enslaved Hebrews . |
| <i>Tula</i> | 2013 | In 1795 on Curaçao , then a Dutch colony, a slave uprising takes place. ^[6] |
| <i>Unchained Memories</i> | 2003 | An HBO documentary featuring the stories of former slaves interviewed during the 1930s as part of the Federal Writers' Project . It compiles slave narratives which are narrated by actors emulating the original conversation with the interviewer. |
| <i>Uncle Tom's Cabin</i> | 1903 | Many film adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel have been made, nine from the silent era (including those of 1918 and 1927) and a German version in 1965. |