

Process Paper

This open-ended project invited students to investigate a topic that genuinely interested them. So we decided to study post-World War II European film, simply because we both love watching movies. We planned to examine the ways film, occasionally dismissed as a trivial distraction lacking any real artistic or historical significance, reflected the political and social trauma of post-war Europe.

During our first week of research, we surfed online lists and sought advice from David's grandfather, a longtime movie buff, hoping to find a handful of post-WWII films that somehow captured sweeping historical trends. After settling on four movies – *The Lost Ones* (Germany), *The Bicycle Thief* (Italy), *Forbidden Games* (France) and *Passport to Pimlico* (Britain) – we read film historian David Thompson's book *The Big Screen*, an ambitious survey of cinema history; visited sites such as Film Comment and Film Reference, which provided sharp, intelligent analysis; and analyzed contemporaneous reviews by well-regarded *New York Times* critics like Bosley Crowther. These sources helped us understand both the aesthetic philosophies (film noir, neorealism, etc.) that underpin the four movies and the historical themes that shape them.

The movies themselves formed the centerpiece of our project. We watched each film carefully, noting scenes that highlight important historical ideas, and used secondary sources – encyclopedia entries on the Italian economy; Peter Hennessy's book *Never Again*, a history of post-war Britain; a recent *Guardian* essay about the concept of Britishness – to build layers of historical context into our project. Primary source documents, such as Carl Jung's essay on collective guilt and an American newspaper article about President Eisenhower's aggressive denazification program, proved especially useful in our research on the German movie *The Lost Ones*.

Our project isn't close to perfect. We set out not only to watch and understand four films, but also to study the post-war history of four very different countries. In retrospect, we probably should have established a more manageable goal. For instance, if we had focused solely on Italian neorealism, an aesthetic movement driven by the economic struggles of post-war Italy, we would have produced a far more comprehensive website. Moreover, as we assembled the site, we realized that our research on *Forbidden Games* – which, unlike the other three movies, is set during the war rather than after it – simply wasn't thorough enough to justify a place in our final project.

Our website illustrates the historical theme “through their eyes,” demonstrating how the lives of ordinary people – an unemployed Italian, a German doctor, a town full of working-class Brits – reflected national problems. Our project is not only a testament to film's historical relevance; it's also a reminder that history encompasses more than just the political maneuverings of an exclusive group of “great men.”