



Dear Teachers,

This guide has been developed as preparation and follow-up for your screening at the Reel Fun Film Festival of the film "The Lady From Sockholm".

Background

Film Noir

1940s US new mood of cynicism, pessimism and darkness which had crept into the American cinema Derived from series noir-popular detective novels in France and 'hard-boiled' school of American crime writers

- Downbeat atmosphere and graphic violence
- Post-war American pessimism, pervasive existential cynicism
- Corruption of society-hypocrisies of postwar American society, such as soldiers not heroes, rejected
- Greed, lust, cruelty

The protagonists are frequently unsympathetic anti-heroes who pursue their basic designs or drift aimlessly through sinister night worlds of the urban American jungle, but they are just as often decent people caught by traps of corrupt society.

Anti-traditional cinematography

- Wide-angle lenses
- Low key lighting
- Night for night shooting
- German and East European filmmakers influence
- Exteriors on location

Influences

- German Expressionism and horror, American gangster film of 1930s, poetic realism, hard boiled of American fiction, Freud, postwar American dissolutionment, Cold War paranoia, Citizen Kane

Characteristics of film noir

- highly stylized, particularly in expressive use of lighting, light and darkness
- hardboiled language, "tough"; nighttime scenes; criminal world/world of
- decadence, perversion and moral ambiguity - sense of alienation, fatalism and paranoia

(From A History of Narrative Cinema, David Cook)

Key Characters

America's entry into the war in 1942 meant big changes in the position of women which made their portrayals as mere girlfriends problematic.





- Traditional models for representing sex/gender relations came increasingly into conflict with the realities of world where women were taking over men's jobs (and looking after the home while their husbands were away fighting).
- As sociologists Edhol, Harris, and Young (quoted in Denning 1987) suggest, that the emerging contradiction between the sex/gender system and the sexual division of labour 'provided a potential for struggle and questioning, for sexual hostility and antagonism'.

This contradiction worked its way into film noir.

- One simple role reversal is that of seducer and seducee.
- Women are femme fatales, preying on confused males.

Narrative Structure

The rise-and-fall narrative, a plot in which energy was essential, is little found in film noir (and when it is it is ironically bookended by flashbacks (Double Indemnity, 1944).

- The rise-and-fall structure is replaced by that of the investigation, often in a present that is seemingly stretched to fill the running time of a film, leaving the central character trapped in the ceaseless present in which time is forever running out.

Increasingly, what came to be the issue and under examination was not the group and society but the individual and a divided self.

- Just as the war brought about a radical change in the cultural pattern of life in America, so the influx of European émigrés increased the speed of dissemination in American intellectual life and the ideas associated with Sigmund Freud.
- As psychology and psychoanalysis found their way to Hollywood in the late 1940s they provided writers and directors with the image of an over-and under world within a single person
- Notions of doubleness and divided identity also came in via artists steeped in the Romantic tradition or who had worked in the German expressionist cinema in the 1920s.
- This influence was to surface first in the horror film of the 1930s and then in the 1940s film noir.

John Huston's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), adapted from Dashiell Hammett's novel and one of the earliest films noir, provides a starting point from which to examine changes in the narrative strategies of the crime film and the emergence of noir as the dominant form of the genre through the decade.

The central plot—the recovery of an obscure object of value—harks back to plots from Victorian times and earlier.

- The film's hero, Sam Spade, is neither a saint nor sinner but a vulnerable and emotional man who is rejected by the seductive villainess Mary Astor.



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- Astor is a strong, manipulative woman playing at being vulnerable, seen in a mix of gleaming close-ups and a network of shadows that prefigure her journey to jail.
- At the centre of this rich mixture are the notions of indulgence, represented by Astor and Greenstreet, against which Bogart guards himself, and doubleness in which the characters can be seen as alternatives of each other.
- The Maltese Falcon clip or trailer
- The one thing that is missing from the film is a flashback.
- The use of flashbacks was to become a staple item of film noir, where one of its major purposes was to deny the effect of progress.
- Hence the decline of the rise-and-fall scenario
- By suggesting that looking back was the dominant experience, the hope of the future is forever tarnished.
- In such a world where pools of light obscure as much as they reveal, the simpler dramatics that supported the structure of the gangster film, where opposition was countered by a mass of machine-guns, could not survive.
- Double Indemnity clip ch.2 - confession scene
(From Crime Movies, by Phil Hardy)

Film Synopsis

The Lady from Sockholm

Dir. Evan Lieberman, Eddy Von Mueller, 2005, USA, 71 Mins - English

Non-stop puns, endearing characters, and more film noir references than you can shake a pair of cheap nylons at. Are you ready for the world's first all sock puppet feature film?

Wool War II rages and times are tough for sock puppets. Terrence M. Cotton, a washed-up gumshoe, finds himself knee-high in debt and praying for a big case. Enter Heelda Brum, a finely spun piece of high-end hosiery who hires Cotton to find Darnell, her missing mate. When Darnell's unraveled remains are discovered local hood Big Toeny Marnetti is at the top of Cotton's suspect list, but Cotton soon discovers that hostile witnesses and Heelda's dirty secrets may have stained the investigation. But can a clean sock find justice in a dirty town? As Cotton threads the strands of the case together, he must watch his step or risk meeting the same frayed fate as Darnell.

NOTE: This film is family friendly, but does contain some mildly suggestive humor and action elements. As a comparison for parents, it is similar in tone to The Pink Panther and Who Framed Roger Rabbit.

Curriculum Themes: Discrimination, overcoming bad habits, teamwork, film noir, puppetry

www.sockholm.com/



Pre-Screening Exercises

Objective: By watching clips students will become familiar with the characteristics of film noir narrative, key characters and visual style. The students will be able to recognize the film noir references when viewing The Lady from Sockholm.

Materials: DVDs of The Maltese Falcon, Double Indemnity

- Show clips from film noir films.
- Write a 3 – 5 page script using a film noir plot, key characters (femme fatale, private eye) and locations.
- Discuss the film scripts as a class, compare and contrast the characters, plots and locations the students included in their scripts

Post-Screening Questions

- What do you remember the most of the film? What was the film about?
- How would you describe the narrative structure? What is the central premise?
- Who were the main characters in the film?
- How would you describe the visual style of the film (lighting, locations, puppetry)?
- How would you describe the costumes?
- In what time period does the film take place?
- What historical events does the film reference?
- What kinds of shots were used (close-up, medium or long shots)? Why were certain kinds of shots chosen by the director?
- How would you describe the pacing of the film?
- Why do you think the director chose to make a film noir with puppets?
- Did you like or dislike the use of puppets to tell a film noir story? Why?
- How would you compare the Lady of Sockholm to the film noir clips we viewed in class?
- If you were to make a film noir film, what would your film be like?

Related Films

- The Maltese Falcon (1941)
- Laura (1944)
- Double Indemnity (1944)
- Out of the Past (1947)
- Gun Crazy (1948)
- The Big Heat (1953)
- A Touch of Evil (1958)
- Chinatown (1975)
- Bladerunner (1982)



Further Reading

Cameron, Ian, ed. (1992) [The Movie Book of Film Noir](#) Studio Vista, London

Kaplan, E. Ann, ed. (1980) [Women in Film Noir](#) BFI, London

Naremore, James (1998) [More than Night: Film Noir in its Contexts](#) California University Press, Berkely

Silver, Alain and Elizabeth Ward, eds. (1992) [Film Noir: An Encyclopedic Reference to American Film Style](#)