

# Commercial Films/Video Tapes On Teaching

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Three categories of film or video are included here, depending on whether teaching occurs in the setting of a school (Category I), in a tutorial relationship between teacher and student (Category II), or simply as a plot device in a comedy about or parody of teaching and schooling (Category III). Films described in Category I are listed alphabetically, within decade headings; it is the year the film was made, not the time period it depicts, that determines the decade in which the film is classified.

## Category I: Depicting Teachers in School Settings

### 1930's

***Goodbye, Mr. Chips*** (1939). Robert Donat, Greer Garson. British schoolmaster devoted to "his boys." Remade as musical in 1969, starring Peter O'Toole; remake received poor reviews. If you select this film, please do not use the remade version; use the original, 1939, film. It is a first-rate film.

### 1940's

***The Corn is Green*** (1945). Bette Davis, Nigel Bruce. Devoted teacher copes with prize pupil in Welsh mining town in 1895. (1 hr 35 min) Highly regarded remake in 1979 stars Katherine Hepburn in her last teaming with director George Cukor. OK to use either version (1945 or 1979).

### 1950's

***Blackboard Jungle*** (1955). Glenn Ford, Anne Francis. Teacher's difficult adjustment to New York City schools. First commercial film to feature rock music.

### 1960's

***The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie*** (1969). Maggie Smith. Eccentric teacher in British girls school. Smith wins Oscar for her performance. Remade as TV miniseries.

***To Sir With Love*** (1967, British). Sidney Poitier. First year teacher in a tough London school.

***Up the Down Staircase*** (1967). Sandy Dennis. Based on Bel Kaufman's book of the same title, describing zany escapades in the NYC schools.

### 1970's

***Conrack*** (1974). Jon Voight. Based on Pat Conroy's *The Water is Wide*, about a teacher's struggle to educate poor black children living on an island off South Carolina.

### 1980's

***Dead Poet's Society*** (1989; set in late 1950's). Robin Williams. Powerful teacher of English in a New England prep school creates havoc for his students and school.

***Lean on Me*** (1989). Morgan Freeman. Story of Joe Clark, the bat-carrying,

bullhorn-toting principal of a New Jersey high school.

***Stand and Deliver*** (1987). Edward James Olmos. Demanding math teacher achieves remarkable results with L.A. barrio students.

***Summer School*** (1987). Mark Harmon, Kristie Alley. Comedy about a not-very-adept gym teacher assigned to teach a remedial summer school class. The teacher finds more talent within himself and his students than anyone else believed was there.

Films and video tapes on teaching

***Teachers*** (1984). Nick Nolte, JoBeth Williams. Satire and some drama set in an urban school (filmed in Columbus, Ohio). Interesting spoofs on stereotyped teachers and some great lines about teaching, though depth of portrayals not great.

### 1990's

***Dangerous Minds*** (1995). Michelle Pfeiffer. Ex-Marine is hired straight out of student teaching to teach English to "difficult" students. Contains some very engaging moments, but ends in classic Hollywood style. Based on a true story (see LouAnne Johnson, *My Posse Don't Do Homework*). Rated R.

***Little Man Tate*** (1991). Jodie Foster, Adam Hann-Byrd. Child prodigy of cocktail-waitress mother longs for the life of a regular youngster, while mother and director of gifted school struggle over his education and future.

***Mr. Holland's Opus*** (1996). Recently released film about the career of a music teacher.

## **Category II: Depicting Teaching in Tutorial Relationships**

The films listed below are framed around tutorial relationships, not based in school settings.

***Educating Rita*** (1983, British). Michael Caine, Julie Walters. Adaptation of Willy Russell's stage play about working-class woman who wants to better herself, with the help of an alcoholic professor.

***The Man Without a Face*** (1993). A 1990s update on the theme of the tutor who makes a winner out of a youngster who might be considered mediocre without assistance.

***Searching for Bobby Fischer*** (1993). Chess prodigy struggles for balance among parents and competing tutors, while heading towards the state championship playoffs against a win-at-any-cost peer. Several important themes in child-rearing and education are thoughtfully handled in this entertaining film.

## **Category III: Films Using Schools or Teachers as Plot Devices, Without Pedagogical Merit**

The films and videos listed below make use of schools as plot settings, or of students or teachers as central characters, but they generally have little relation to actual teaching, learning, or school activities. Some of these films are quite good, and some are without aesthetic merit or entertainment value. These films are grouped here primarily because they do not offer much insight into the conception of teaching and schooling in the popular culture.

***The Breakfast Club*** (1985). Emilio Estevez. More about teens in these times than about schools and teaching.

***Fast Times at Ridgemont High*** (1982). Sean Penn. Southern California high schoolers hanging out at the malls and talking about you-know-what. Pertains more to the teen set in California than to teachers and school.

***Heathers*** (1989). Winona Ryder, Christian Slater. Like *Breakfast Club*, it pertains more to the social system of teens in school than about teaching and schooling.

***Iron and Silk*** (1991). Mark Salzman. An American fan of Chinese martial arts accepts a position as a teacher of English in a Chinese college.

***The Student Teachers*** (1973). Susan Damante, Brooke Mills, Bob Harris. A few educational ideas stirred into a sex-exploiting plot (rated R). Followed two years later by *Summer School Teachers*.

***Summer School Teachers*** (1975). Candice Realson, Pat Anderson, Rhonda Leigh-Hopkins. Romantic adventures of three high school teachers (rated R).

#### Acknowledgment

Many of the film descriptions above were adapted from Leonard Maltin's *Movie and Video Guide, 1997 Edition* (New York: Plume/Penguin Books, 1996).

**Suggestions for films and videos to include on this list are welcome.**