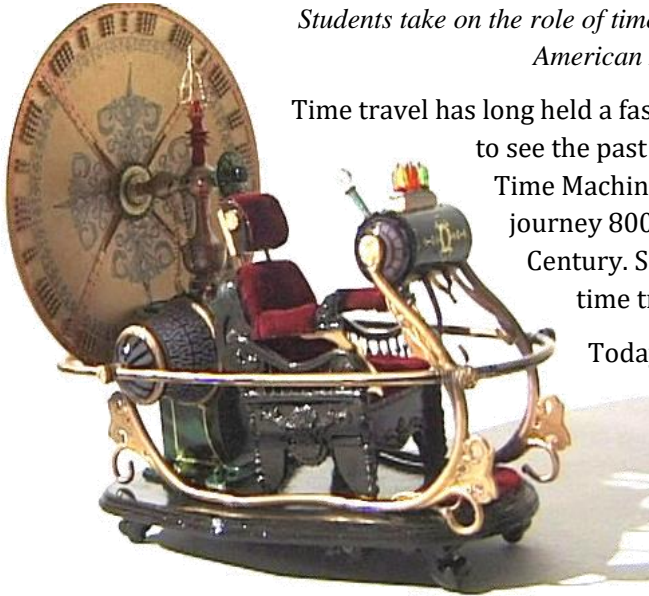


The Myths of Time: Making History

Students take on the role of time travelers and take part the major events and discoveries of American History in this fun and fascinating series.

Time travel has long held a fascination for many of us. The idea that we could use science to see the past and the future has been with us since HG Wells penned *The Time Machine* (the Time Traveller's astonishing firsthand account of his journey 800,000 years beyond his own era) at the end of the 19th Century. Since then, sci-fi comics and Hollywood have built an entire time travel industry.



Today, man is successfully probing deep into the mysteries of the universe. Can he penetrate the greatest mystery of all - time itself? At least one scientist thinks so. According to him it works something like this: we know that massive objects, such as stars and planets, can bend both space and time. Dr Mallett and others

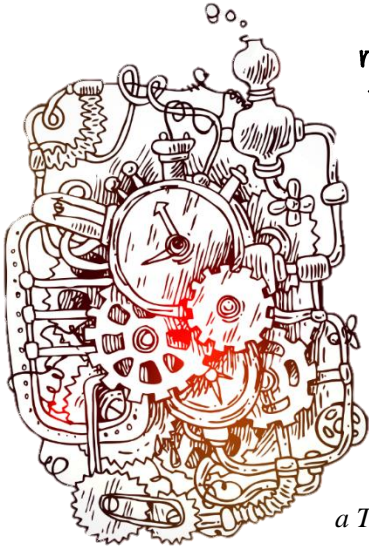
believe that light too, because of its inherent energy, can also bend what's called the space/time continuum.

Build yourself an extremely powerful ring laser, and pop some material - maybe even one day a human - in the center of this vortex of light, and you might just be able to drag what's inside the machine back or forward through time.

Unfortunately, talk of time travel and vortices smacks of science fiction, sounding like something straight out of an episode of *Dr. Who*. And that instinctively makes many a scientist uncomfortable. But sometimes it's important to be wrong...Much of the science being done today in many fields will turn out to be wrong. Being wrong is an essential part of investigating the universe.

But who knows where it might lead? After all, "this notion, this longing, of being able to change the past, or to know what is going to come next; what's it going to be like a hundred years from now, 200 years from now? These, I think, are just so ingrained in us - this notion - that I think it's fundamental."





Time to Rewind

For now, Doc Brown's DeLorean is out of commission, Bill and Ted's time traveling phone booth has traveled to a future utopia, the Doctor is who knows where, and Mrs. Frizzle's magic school bus is on the fritz...so how can we travel through the Myths of Time? With a bit of study and a lot of imagination (and the help of some good books) we'll hit the 'Rewind' button on our V.H.S., Vehicle of Historic Study that is. Come on, hop in the machine and hear it whrrrrr as the years go past in a blur! But we'll have to be careful, just in case, we don't want to change time or space! For a fun introduction to time travel read *Oh No! Not Again!: (Or How I Built a Time Machine to save History)* with students.



Lesson One

LET'S GO BACK...

to When the West Was Wild!

"This is the West, sir. When legend becomes fact, print the legend."

Where are we? *When* are we?

Wild rivers. Rugged mountains! An unknown time to explore. We will face them all and will need your help on our incredible adventure. *Create a wall-sized class Geography of History (aka US) map to generate interest and create a backdrop for the Trail Game, upon which we can written descriptions of geographic features, facts we learn and historical places we find and people we meet.*

From the beginning of time, people have told stories, regaling their friends and families with tales of adventure, hard times, interesting people, frightening experiences and everyday life. Sometimes these were truths, others exaggerations, and occasionally nothing more than tall tales. The more interesting of these narratives were passed around from friend to friend and from father to son, sometimes altering along the way or growing in strength to the point that they became legends, folklore, or questionable myths.



American History is filled with folklore, Native American mythology, and real truths that make for wonderful campfire tales. In these stories, much like earlier



European, Greek and Roman tales, the accounts can often be only be guessed at, as to whether they are fact or fiction, but they continue to make the rounds of new generations.

In many of these old legends, told around the campfire or a roaring hearth, can be heard the approach of galloping horses, the whispers of phantoms in ghost towns, the far-off sounds of pistols blazing, and the sighing moans of the winds drifting through the ancient trees of hunting, mining, and cowboy camps.

Keepin' the Peace and a Piece of Your Heart:

Gunsmoke

Ask students what, in their opinion, makes for 'good tv.' Many will think a high reliance on special effects, aliens, etc. "Gunsmoke," the longest-running drama in US television history (20 seasons and 635 episodes), was set in Dodge City. *Marshal Matt Dillon (then-newcomer James Arness) tries to prevent lawlessness from overtaking Dodge City, Kansas. Helping to keep him grounded are saloon proprietor Miss Kitty Russell and Doc Adams. The television series grew out of the long-running radio serial of the same name, although for a short time they were both on the airwaves.*

Arguably one of the most beloved and famous 'western' tv shows (the pilot episode was introduced by John Wayne himself!). It was the second Western television series written for adults. "Gunsmoke is routinely placed among the best shows of any kind and any time." In 1956, its second season on the air, the series entered the list of top ten programs on U.S. television and moved quickly to number one. It remained in that position until 1961 and in the top twenty until 1964. Following a shift in its programming time in 1967, *Gunsmoke* returned to prominence within the top twenty for the next seven years, dropping out only in its final year. From 1987 to the present there have been four *Gunsmoke* "reunion" programs, presented as two-hour, made-for-television movies.



Gunsmoke didn't have a lot of fancy special effects (for a long time it didn't even have color!) So what made it so popular for so long (even today)? People came to care about the characters. "While *Gunsmoke* had its share of shoot-outs, bank robberies, cattle rustlings, and the like, the great strength of the program was the ongoing exploration of life in this community, with these people, in this place, at this time. In *Gunsmoke*, Dodge City stands as an outpost of civilization, the edge of America at the end of a century. It is one of the central images of the Western in any of its media creations--a small town, a group of professionals, perhaps a school and a church, surrounded by the dangers of the frontier, its values of peace, harmony, and justice always under



threat from untamed forces. Such a setting becomes a magnified experiment for the exploration of fundamental ideas about American culture and society. Issues faced by the characters and community in Gunsmoke ranged from questions of legitimate violence to the treatment of minority groups, from the meaning of family to the power of religious commitment. Even topics drawn from American life in the 1950s and 1960s were examined in this setting. The historical frame of the Western, and television's reliance on well-known, continuing characters allowed a sense of distance and gave producers the freedom to treat almost any topic.” . — Horace Newcomb - from the [Museum of Broadcast Communications](#) Encyclopedia of Television

At the end of its run in 1975, [Los Angeles Times](#) columnist [Cecil Smith](#) wrote: "Gunsmoke was the dramatization of the American epic legend of the west. Our own *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, created from standard elements of the dime novel and the pulp western as romanticized by [Ned] Buntline, [Bret] Harte, and [Mark] Twain. It was ever the stuff of legend."



Bonanza

In the history of television few shows have ever been as successful as *Bonanza*. In 431 episodes spanning from 1959 to 1973, the Cartwrights of the Nevada Territory's Ponderosa became a fixture of American life. *Bonanza* is NBC's longest-running western, and ranks overall as the second-longest-running western series on U.S. network television (behind CBS's [Gunsmoke](#)). Indeed, it is still being shown on television stations and cable channels across the United States.

Having been constantly run for over fifty years, today we tend to take *Bonanza* for granted, but when it debuted it was a ground breaking show, a fact that largely explains its success. *Bonanza* was different from anything that had come before it. When *Bonanza* premiered in 1959, the airwaves were saturated with sitcoms that depicted fathers as idiots managed by their wives.



The producer insisted that the show be an hour long instead of a half hour in order to ensure that he had time to depict Ben Cartwright as a father figure worthy of respect. It worked, and Lorne Greene (the actor who

Did You Know??

Pernell Roberts (who played Adam) absolutely despised the show and tried to get out of his contract at the outset, saying it wasn't what he thought he was signing up for. It took him six years of steady resistance before NBC gave in. Roberts considered the scripts too low brow, demeaning to women (making them 'want to be carried off by a Cartwright'), and indecently glorifying wealth and the wealthy in an age where poverty was widespread. Roberts' politics were strongly progressive by the standards of the time, and he pushed producers to have Adam Cartwright marry a Native American woman played by a black actress. In 1965 he was earning \$10,000 per episode, plus residuals, but expressed no regrets even years later at leaving the fame and money behind.



played Ben Cartwright) received thousands of fan letters from teenage boys who wished that he was their father.

Bonanza was the first of television's ranch Westerns. It centered on the Ponderosa, a huge ranch ran by the Cartwright family. The Cartwrights consisted of patriarch Ben (Lorne Greene); calm and cool oldest brother Adam (Pernell Roberts); middle brother and gentle giant Hoss (the most popular character on the show); and romantic and reckless youngest brother Little Joe (Michael Landon). The title "Bonanza" is a term used by miners in regard to a large vein or deposit of ore, and commonly refers to the 1859 revelation of the Comstock Lode discovery, not far from the fictional Ponderosa Ranch that the Cartwright family operated.

Although considered a Western, in many respects it was less a Western than it was a period drama that just happened to be set in Nevada in the 1860's. Gunfights were rare and problems were usually settled by discussion between the characters rather than through violence. *Bonanza* also dealt with social issues. Over the years the show dealt with everything from racism to political corruption to religious intolerance. *Bonanza* was also one of the earliest shows to regularly feature minority characters.

Grab the Remote! It's time to View and Vote!

Have students watch an [episode](#) (or two) of both shows with a close viewing and a critical eye. **Prepare by previewing the program and all parts you will watch with your students.** *Make viewing an active process, perhaps best thought of as an interactive experience between viewer and medium. In addition to responding to what they observe from the screen, viewers bring their own experiences and expectations to their viewing.*

Encourage student participation through

- *setting the context before viewing*
- *pausing during the program to ask key questions and flag priority topics*
- *promoting reflection through post-viewing discussion and assignments*

Act as peers with them, a fellow watcher who can share and discuss the viewing experience with them.

Everything you see and hear when watching a film, any film or tv show, is a *conscious choice* by the director. Let's read what we see!

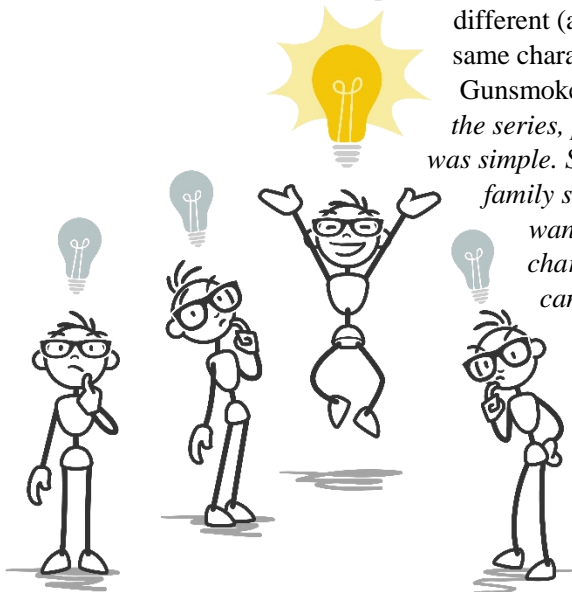
- Characters: **Write down the major characters appearing in the scene?** Also look for extras (supporting actors who don't speak) and bit players (supporting actors who have a few lines of dialog).
- Scene Location: **Jot down a note of where the scene(s) take place, both in terms of the place and the time.**
- What is shown?: **Pay careful attention to how what you see in the scene helps to tell the story.** Ex. Lighting (Dark & shadowy? Bright & sunny? Is there a color to the light?), Focus (what is focused & what is fuzzy/out-of-focus—does it change?) **Take a few notes that will help you remember.**
- Camera Shots: **Make a list of every camera shot you notice.** Tip: A typical scene can include dozens of shots, from close-ups on a character's face to extreme long shots showing the entire scene from a great distance. There are also shots during which the camera moves, tracking the movements of a character or zooming in on an object. **Each is meant to serve a purpose in telling the story.**



- Music & Sounds: **Close your eyes and concentrate, what do you hear during the scene?** Write down notes about what you notice.
- Narration: Note whether the scene is narrated and determine why the filmmaker included narration.
- Message & Purpose: What is the filmmaker trying to say through this episode?

If watching multiple episodes of each/either show have students do a comparison after each one.

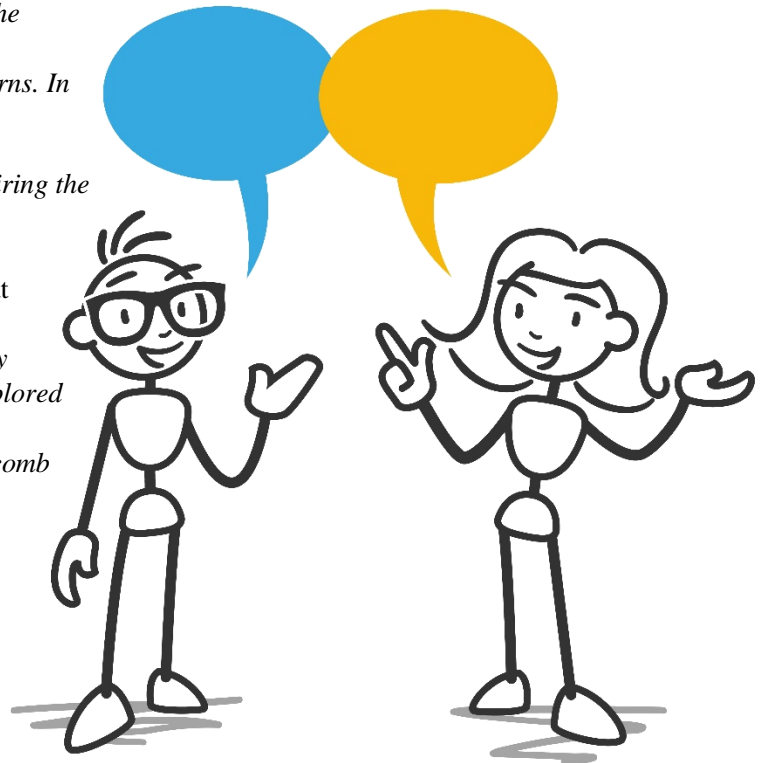
- How are the episodes (of the same show) similar (do they follow a pattern? If so, what is it?) and how are they different (are there new characters/the same characters in each one?) Ex. In *Gunsmoke*, *The dramatic formula for the series, particularly in later years, was simple. Some type of "outsider"--a*



family separated from a wagon train, an ex-Confederate officer, a wandering theatre troupe--entered the world of the regular characters. With the outsiders came conflict. With the conflict came the need for decision and action. If violence was called for, it was applied reluctantly. If compassion was the answer, it was available. Often, no solution so simple solved the problems. Many sides of the same issue could be presented, especially when moral problems, not action and adventure, were the central concerns. In such

cases Gunsmoke often ended in ambiguity, requiring the ideas and issues to be pondered by viewers.—Horace Newcomb

- Did we learn anything new about a character that we'd met before? If so, what? *As the series progressed into its last seasons, it became highly self-conscious of its own history. Characters explored their own motivations with some frequency, and memories became plot devices. .—Horace Newcomb*
- Is the point of view always the same/is the story told from the same character's viewpoint?
- Do the shows have a similar formula?
- Do the students prefer one or the other? Take a vote and have them defend their decision.

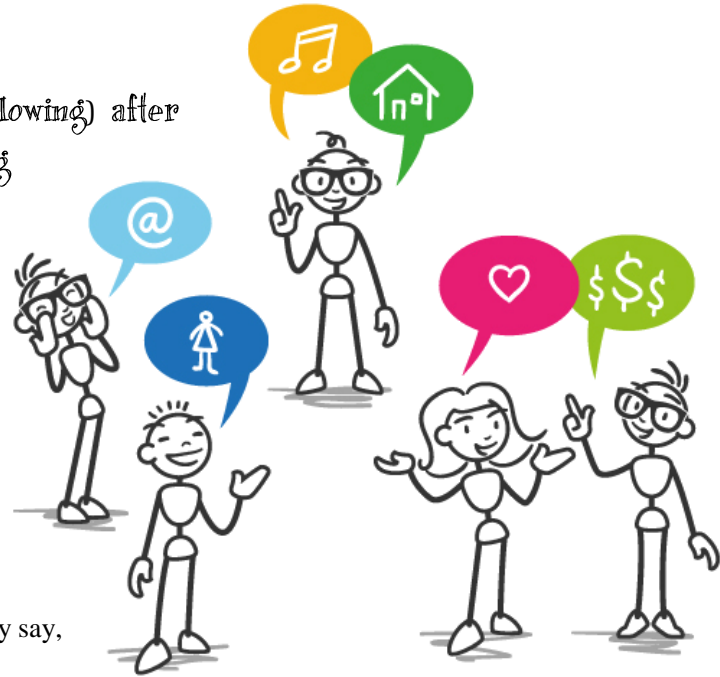


Did You Know?

Dortort (the producer) had envisioned *Bonanza* as an Old West presentation of the legend of King Arthur. Ben Cartwright was King Arthur and his sons were his knights. **Would you have gotten that reference from just watching the show? Why/why not? What other works of classic literature might influence your favorite shows?**

Ask students additional questions (such as the following) after watching each episode to get them really thinking about what they saw:

- Who are these people?
- Where are they?
- Why are they together?
- What happened at the beginning?
- Was there a ‘problem’ in the story that needed to be solved?
- What happened at the conclusion/ending? Did the problem get resolved?
- What can you tell about the characters from what they say, how they look, how they interact with one another?
- Were there characters--either heroes or villains--that you cared about?
- What, if anything, does the show say about life, friendship, relationships between women and men and so on?
- What did you feel while you were watching it? ‘
- Were there points where you were nervous, laughed, angry/upset? When and why?
- Does the show imitate real life in your opinion? Why or why not?
- Do people you know act like this?
- Do you think people try to act like these characters? If so, who and why?
- Do they think this show/either show was a generally realistic representation of the ‘Old West’, the people, and typical events?’ Why or why not?



Did you notice??

The characters in *Bonanza* wear the same outfits almost every episode! Why do you think they did it? This was done to make it easier to work in stock footage when necessary -- not that the show was cheap. At \$100,000-150,000 per episode, *Bonanza* was among the most expensive shows on TV during its run and it was the first Western to ever be aired in color.

Let's find out!

