

The Well-Trained Mind Academy
Japanese Culture Through Film
Summer Session

Course Blackboard site: wtma.blackboard.com

Required Films

- [Kiki's Delivery Service](#)
- [Howl's Moving Castle](#)
- [Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind](#)
- [From Up On Poppy Hill](#)
- [Porco Rosso](#)
- [The Wind Rises](#)
- [Only Yesterday](#)

Description

For decades, the animated films and TV series of Japan have delighted audiences throughout the world. But how closely related are the Japan of *anime* and the Japan of the real world? What can we learn about the history and culture of the Japanese people through their most famous and popular films? Students will explore these and related questions in this friendly seminar-style introduction to Japanese history, folklore, and pop culture.

Assignments

Students are expected to: watch each week's assigned film *in Japanese with English subtitles*; read the assigned reading, if applicable; and write a 350-500 word reflection on the film and reading, due before the beginning of each class. Films may be purchased via Amazon or [GKids](#). (Remember to check your local library before purchasing!)

Beginning in Week 2, students will take turns leading the discussion in class. These prompters prepare questions and observations for their classmates, and help guide discussion.

For the final class meeting, students will research, watch, and prepare a 5 to 7 minute presentation about a Japanese film not covered in class. This film may be animated or live-action. A list of suggestions may be found below, but any Japanese film is acceptable.

PARENTAL ADVISORY: The materials covered in this class contain content that some families may consider objectionable, including: partial non-sexual nudity (e.g., breastfeeding, bathing); ancestor worship and nature worship; major character death; neglect of children; animated gore; and Japanese perspectives on World War II. Parents are advised to consult the IMDb Parent Guide or another content-warning resource before enrolling their student, and to assist their

student in selecting an appropriate film for the final presentation. Bear in mind that other students may present about films that your family prefers not to watch.

Evaluation

- Class Attendance: 20%
- Participation: 20%
- Weekly Writing Assignments: 40%
- Film Presentation: 20%

Example Schedule

Date	Film Title	Reading Assignment	Learning Goals
Week 1	Kiki's Delivery Service	None (see course website for writing assignment)	-Essential themes of Studio Ghibli films
Week 2	Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind	- Japan's Emerald Carpets: The Cultural Importance and Environmental Promise of Moss at Nippon.com - How a Plant Saved a Japanese Island by Jaime Lafferty (BBC Travel, January 7, 2020)	-Environmentalism & conservation in Japan -Technology in Japanese life
Week 3	Porco Rosso	TBD	-Japan & Western culture -Magic & fantasy in Japanese art -Japan's role in World War I
Week 4	Kaze Tachinu	- Pearl Harbor Attack Documents at Internet Modern History Sourcebook - The Graveyard by the Sea by Paul Valery (poem that inspired the novel <i>The Wind Rises</i>) - My father, the quiet hero: how Japan's Schindler saved 6,000 Jews by Jennifer Rankin (<i>The Guardian</i> , January 4, 2020)	-World War II Japan; supporters, dissidents, and in-betweeners -Critical thinking & historical fiction

Week 5	From Up On Poppy Hill	TBD	-Postwar occupation and reconstruction -Tokyo Olympics then and now
Week 6	Only Yesterday	- Migrants in Japan Struggle to Adapt by Matt Katz (<i>The Atlantic</i> , December 23, 2019)	-Urban Japan vs. rural Japan -School and work in Japan -Social problems in Japan
Week 7	Howl's Moving Castle	None (see course website for writing assignment)	-"Ghibli-izing" Western novels
Week 8	Class Presentations		

Suggested Films for Presentations

Films from Japanese Animation Studio Ghibli

- Ponyo
- Pompono
- The Secret World of Arrietty
- Castle in the Sky
- My Neighbors the Yamadas
- Ocean Waves

Films Directed by Akira Kurosawa

- Seven Samurai
- Stray Dog
- Ikiru
- Rashomon
- Yojimbo

Films Directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda

- Nobody Knows
- Like Father Like Son
- After the Storm
- Our Little Sister

Other Popular Japanese Films/Films About Japanese Culture

- Jiro Dreams of Sushi
- The Kingdom of Dreams and Madness
- Departures
- The Taste of Tea
- Akira

- Ghost in the Shell

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Required Films

- [Spirited Away](#)
- [Whisper of the Heart](#)
- [When Marnie Was There](#)
- [The Tale of the Princess Kaguya](#)
- [Princess Mononoke](#)
- [Grave of the Fireflies](#)
- [My Neighbor Totoro](#)

These should be available on blu-ray, DVD, Prime Video rental, and the HBO Max streaming service. If you subscribe to HBO Max, you should have access to all of these films.

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