

## **DVD LESSON PLAN: MR. SMITH GOES TO WASHINGTON**

**DVD Title:** *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

**Content:** Nominated for 11 Oscars, Frank Capra’s ever-timely drama of Washington cynicism and corruption vs. small-town idealism gives students a provocative look at realpolitik in America. Appointed to the Senate, a young James Stewart is confounded by the machinations of his colleagues—especially the once-admired Claude Rains—to enact legislation harmful to the public interest. Unable to budge the politicians, Stewart takes his case directly to the people with surprising results. Black-and-white. Columbia.

**Special Features of this DVD:**

Frank Capra, Jr. commentary

Frank Capra Jr. remembers... “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington”.

Vintage advertising

Original theatrical trailer

Bonus trailers

Talent files

Languages: English, Spanish, and Portuguese

Subtitles: English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Korean, and Thai.

**Suggested Grade Level:** 5 and up.

**Time:** Full movie is 125 minutes.

**Outcomes:**

Students will:

- explore the theme of idealism in politics
- evaluate the film’s message

**Prior Knowledge Required:**

**Lesson format/ strategies:**

1. Opening question suggestions:

“Is there a place for idealism in American politics?”

“What kind of people run for political office?”

2. Using the DVD:

While watching the movie, have students fill in the **film analysis sheet**. Use the questions as a basis for debriefing what the students watched.

3. Take up the answers to the questions. Continue a discussion using the following as a guide:

What does the film tell you about the time period? Do you think it is accurate?

What is the role of corruption in politics today?

Ask again, “Is there a place for idealism in American politics?”

Why do you think the film was so popular?

**Extension Activity:**

Have students research other Capra films and determine if they have common themes. Do they reveal a realistic picture of American society in their time periods?

FILM ANALYSIS GUIDE SHEET—*Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*

1. How does Jefferson Smith become a senator?
2. Compare Jefferson Smith's characteristics with the other possible appointees.
3. Use two or three words to describe Taylor and Paine.
4. What concepts does the director try to convey in the montage of monuments and music during Smith's tour of Washington?
5. Why does Smith become so angry with the press after he arrives in Washington?
6. How accurate are the descriptions by Saunders of how a bill becomes law, and the newscaster's definition of a filibuster?
7. Is Paine's final confession realistic? What does it reveal about politicians or the nature of politics in the United States?