Active Viewers Guide

Trumbo

1. **Step 1** – Let’s view the trailer to the 2015 film Trumbo (located at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e9HbaaSuKm4).

2. **Step 2** – Please locate the Pre-Viewing: About Trumbo for class review.

3. **Step 3** – We will now view the film, only to stop at Trumbo’s HUAC testimony (to view the videos linked below and to read the note below it), and we will also stop each time we are introduced to the characters that are found on the Cast of Trumbo page.

   a. We will stop to view a short history of HUAC located at https://youtu.be/FSRaDEUGRkM, and Dalton Trumbo’s HUAC testimony (located at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1zGHZPwlMHy) at that point in the film. Prior to watching the video we will read:

      Yes, Trumbo was a communist. He even openly tells his daughter about it in the movie, but he believes that shouldn’t determine whether he should work or not. In the actual footage above, you can see his 1947 testimony in front of the House Committee on Un-American Activities where he was held in contempt of Congress for not admitting to being a communist. In the film’s press notes, Niki said that being a communist in the ‘40s "meant that you were pro-labor and anti-Jim Crow, and you fought for civil rights for African Americans," she said. "It had nothing to do with Russia and everything to do with how an already great country could improve itself." Trumbo ended up going to prison for 11 months because of his beliefs. Cranston’s re-enactment of the testimony is uncanny and one of the most memorable scenes in the film.

4. **Step 4** – After viewing the film, we will use the case of Elia Kazan – the filmmaker and former communist notorious for naming names to HUAC – to study the effect of HUAC and the backlash.

   a. First, we will view HUAC and the Backlash 1 located at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9p9Ga09P_w.

   b. Second, we will read the note located below, followed by viewing HUAC ad Backlash 2 located at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJTD79G5jpg.

      i. The video linked directly above frames the playwright (and one-time husband of Marilyn Monroe) Arthur Miller as the virtuous counter to Elia Kazan’s perception as a traitor. Please note that Arthur Miller did appear before HUAC in 1956, and was not a friendly witness. To be sure, Miller testified about his political leanings (i.e. he answered their questions about his brief flirtation with Communism) but refused to name others who had joined him in his pro-Communist undertakings. The committee had subpoenaed Miller after he sought to renew his passport. Miller planned to go to London with movie star Marilyn Monroe, whom he married four days later. The newlyweds were then to travel to Brussels, Belgium, for the opening of Miller’s new play, “The Crucible,” which dissected the 1692 witch hunt trials in Salem, Mass. The play serves as a metaphor of the anti-communist hysteria of the 1950s. Miller readily conceded
the committee’s right to inquire into his own political activities. However, unlike most other uncooperative witnesses, he did not invoke the Fifth Amendment’s protection against self-incrimination but rather cited the First Amendment’s guarantee of free speech and, by implication, the right to remain silent. Asked why the Communist Party had produced one of his plays, he said, “I take no more responsibility for who plays my plays than General Motors can take for who rides in their Chevrolets.” Asked about his brief flirtation with Communism, he said, “I have had to go to hell to meet the devil,” after which one wag quipped that he must have gone there as a tourist. In 1957, Miller was found guilty of contempt of Congress, denied a passport and sentenced to a $500 fine or 30 days in jail. But the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals overturned his conviction, ruling that Walter had misled him. Miller and Monroe were divorced in 1961. Miller died in 2005 at age 89.

c. We will conclude by viewing the mixed reaction Kazan received when he was given a Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2008 Academy Awards located at https://youtu.be/EDXD6at6VjE.
Pre-Viewing: About Trumbo

DALTON TRUMBO: AMERICAN SCREENWRITER

In Jay Roach’s TRUMBO, Bryan Cranston embodies the spirit of Dalton Trumbo, the celebrated Hollywood screenwriter whose principled refusal to name names to the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) earned him 13 years in purgatory as a blacklisted writer. For years, his name was literally erased from the scripts he wrote. Even today scores of screenplays he wrote (or rewrote) under various pseudonyms during this dark period remain uncredited to him. But if the blacklist obscured his career, his later exoneration had in some ways a very similar effect by emphasizing his status as a political victim over that of serious screenwriter. Despite winning two Oscars, Trumbo acknowledged, “The blacklist has done more to make my name known than any work I ever did.” Starting in 1935 with Warner Brothers, Trumbo wrote movies in nearly every shape, form, and genre for the next forty years. And he wrote them quickly. In one self-deprecating aside, Trumbo joked, "I may not be the best screenwriter in Hollywood, but I am incomparably the fastest."

Jay Roach’s drama TRUMBO follows the remarkable life of the titled writer (played by Bryan Cranston), from his triumph as a Hollywood screenwriter to his persecution by the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) to his determined climb to redeem his name and former glory. In September 1947, Dalton Trumbo was one of 43 members of the filmmaking community to receive subpoenas to appear before HUAC to answer questions about the spread of communism in Hollywood. Many of the more famous names—Robert Montgomery, Gary Cooper, Ronald Reagan, and Walt Disney—were chosen as “friendly witnesses,” people ready to give the committee what it wanted. Of these, 19—a group of all men composed mostly of screenwriters with some directors and one actor—refused to provide evidence. Of those 19, HUAC called 11 unfriendly witnesses to testify, the 10 who would become the Hollywood Ten (Alvah Bessie, Herbert Biberman, Lester Cole, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner, Jr., John Howard Lawson, Albert Maltz, Samuel Ornitz, Adrian Scott, and Dalton Trumbo), plus German playwright Bertolt Brecht. (Brecht appeared, answered HUAC questions nonsensically, and then left the country the next day, never to return). While many of the Hollywood Ten had worked together in the past and knew each other socially, they were by no means a unified front prior to being called by HUAC. What each held—and what bonded them together—was a belief that HUAC’s intrusion into their personal and political beliefs was unconstitutional and fundamentally un-American. With their lawyers, the Ten agreed to argue that the First Amendment gave them a constitutional waiver from having to answer HUAC’s questions. Congress disagreed and voted to hold all Ten in contempt of Congress. After being convicted in 1948, the Ten appealed to the Supreme Court, which in 1950 refused to hear their case. With no other options, the Ten accepted their punishment. Most were given a $1,000 fine and a year inside a federal prison (although two received 6-month sentences). But jail time was really only the start of their ordeal. When they were released, the Ten, who had worked hard to become successful in their fields, were now blacklisted from working in Hollywood. And they were not alone. Over the next ten years, hundreds of writers, actors, musicians, and other artists would be blacklisted, and scores more would be bullied by the threat of it. TRUMBO dramatizes the story of arguably the most famous of the Hollywood Ten. Here we take a look at the other nine—who they were before HUAC, and what happened after they were blacklisted.
Trumbo's wife, Cleo (Diane Lane) is probably the only person who could ever stand up to the headstrong Hollywood icon. She believed in Trumbo and all that he did, but was strong and independent herself. When she was younger, she was a carhop (that's how Trumbo met her in real life) who had a talent for juggling water glasses — a skill that is shown in the movie.

Hedda was a journalist (of sorts), who famously wore exotic hats and devoted herself to destroying the careers of anyone she identified as being communist, gay or otherwise reprehensible. Among her victims were Charlie Chaplin, Dalton Trumbo and numerous writers and artists caught up in the notorious blacklist era. Helen Mirren does a spot-on portrayal of Hedda Hopper, who was essentially the *Us Weekly*, *Perez Hilton* and *E!* of the time. She was a powerful voice in Hollywood and was determined to bring down Trumbo and anyone like him.

Emanuel Goldenberg, forceful, authoritative character star of Hollywood films, memorable for his tough impersonation of gangster boss Rico Bandello in *Little Caesar* (1930) and many other characterizations of underworld types in Warner's crime cycle of the 30s. Robinson's personal life was beset by problems in the 50s. Despite a well-known record of activity for patriotic causes during and after WWII, his name was linked by Red Channels with Communist-front organizations. He was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee but was cleared of all suspicion and won a clean bill of health.

The Hollywood 10 was a real thing, and the film's portrayal of the 10 stays true to the facts — for the most part. This is a Hollywood movie, and adding nine more characters into a film makes it a little crowded. That's why Trumbo decided to create the character of Arlen Hird, played by Louis C.K. He's a composite of five real-life communist screenwriters who knew Trumbo between 1947-1970: Samuel Ornitz, Alvah Bessie, Albert Maltz, Lester Cole, and John Howard Lawson.
Trumbo worked with Kirk Douglas when he wrote the script for *Spartacus*. It was the first movie after being blacklisted where he didn't use a pseudonym. The two became friends and Douglas gifted him a parrot which was often seen perched on Trumbo's shoulder — just like in the movie.

Frank King (John Goodman) and his brother Herman (Stephen Root) were big-time B-movie producers in the '40s. They didn't care that Trumbo was a communist. They were all about high quantity, low quality films. They just wanted money from the films that they made, so they hired Trumbo to write movies under pseudonyms — which ended up paying the bills for Trumbo while he was blacklisted.

The two sisters, known as Niki and Mitzi, are the last living members of Trumbo's immediate family and were heavily involved in the creation of the movie's script, based on Bruce Cook's book, *Dalton Trumbo*. Roach urged screenwriter John McNamara to reach out to the women, telling *The Hollywood Reporter*, "I encouraged him to get to know the people directly involved." With the help of Trumbo's daughters, the filmmakers were able to ensure that they made a well-balanced story that stayed close to the truth. The addition of the familial relationships had another effect, too: humanizing the legendary Hollywood icon.

Because he was blacklisted, he gave his screenplay, *Roman Holiday*, to his friend and fellow screenwriter, Ian McClellan Hunter, so that he could take credit for it. It ended up winning the Academy Award in 1953. Trumbo also won an Oscar for his screenplay for *The Brave One*, under the name Robert Rich. The Academy eventually awarded him with an award in 1975 for *The Brave One* and then posthumously for *Roman Holiday* in 1993 for *Roman Holiday*. 