

Movie Reviews

Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986)

Directed by John Hughes

Reviewed by Jason Woloski

Ferris Bueller's Day Off is about a character named Ferris, played by Matthew Broderick, who decides that he needs a vacation. The only problem is that it's the middle of the school week, he's already skipped a lot of days, and he's got a sister and the school principal just waiting for him to slip up one more time. Not only that, but Ferris's parents think the world of him, and if they knew how little time he actually spends at school, it would get him into a lot of hot water on both the home front and the school front. Ferris is walking a thin line with so many people breathing down his neck, but to Ferris, taking big risks is what makes life fun.

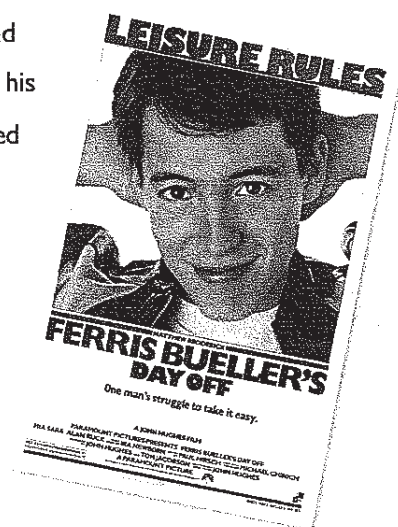
It's not that Ferris is a bad student. In fact, he's too smart for his own good. He's in grade twelve, is about to graduate and, thanks to a lifetime of experience as a student, he's mastered the art of cutting class without anyone knowing about it. On this particular day, he's faking sickness, has rigged up a plan involving a life-size dummy lying in his bed, recorded snoring to make it seem as if he's spent the whole day sleeping, is playing an elaborate game of phone-tag with the school's receptionist and principal, and has borrowed one

vintage Ferrari from his best friend's father's garage.

Ferris' bright future may lie ahead of him, but today all he wants is to leave the world of books and tests behind, convince his girlfriend Sloane (played by Mia Sara) and his loyal best friend Cameron (played by Alan Ruck) to join him, and hit Chicago for an unforgettable day on the town.

Sloane is all for it and can't wait to skip school with Ferris, but Cameron needs convincing. One thing you need to know about Cameron is that he mopes around at the best of times, so anything out of the ordinary isn't likely to turn his frown upside down. Cameron is sort of like Eeyore in a Detroit Red Wings jersey.

Once Cameron finally is on board, though, all three are riding a classic red car into the Windy City...and this is where the plot summary has to stop. I'm stopping, because if you haven't seen this movie, then you have to see the trouble these three find themselves in for yourself. I would love to go into detail about the sorts of craziness Ferris puts Sloane and Cameron through, but all I'll



ask is how incredible do you think a day involving a baseball game at Wrigley Field, visiting the top of the Sears Tower, pretending to be a sausage king, and a whirlwind tour around the Art Institute of Chicago sounds to three students at the height of their school year stress? Are you tired just reading this?

Of course, this movie wouldn't be a classic more than twenty years after being made if it didn't speak to the heart as well as the funny bone. A part of the reason Ferris takes the day off so close to graduation is that no matter what the future holds, he realizes his time in high school is fleeting, that he'll never have this time of his life back no matter how long he lives, and who even knows where even his best friends will end up in a few years time? As Ferris so perfectly puts it, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

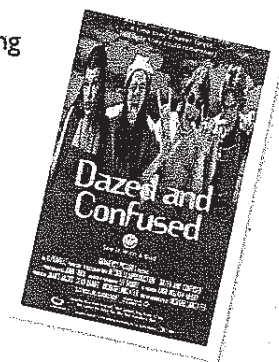
Dazed and Confused (1994)

Directed by Richard Linklater

Reviewed by Jason Woloski

Fitting in is difficult at the best of times, but fitting into a high school scene can be almost impossible. If you get along with one clique, chances are there are three more ready to beat you up. Or, you might be someone who just can't fit in with anyone, and so you float along from group to group. Which is where eleventh grader Randall "Pink" Floyd comes in. Randall, played by Jason

London, is the main character of *Dazed and Confused*, and watching him onscreen is a tutorial in how to get along with classmates. This film is about a lot of things: the end of the school year and the start of the summer; the transition from junior high school to high school, what it was like growing up in Austin, Texas in the 1970s, and of course sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll. However, more than anything else, it's about recognizing high school socializing as one big, complicated maze, a maze which very few people know how to get through unscathed.



Randall is the high school's star quarterback, which obviously helps immensely in the popularity department. However, what's refreshing about Randall is that he refuses to be defined by the expectations of those around him. He treats everyone equally, and even if initially it seems that he is going along with one group in putting down another group, he secretly understands and lets others know that it's all just a game and that deep down, people don't want to feel scared and would rather enjoy each others' company.

For example, if Randall feels limited by his identity as a star athlete, he lets his teammates know how he's feeling by defying the coach's orders and

claiming that he hasn't decided if he's even going to play football in his senior year. Sure, his teammates get angry at him for this type of behaviour, but they respect Randall for respecting himself. As a local sports hero, Randall is expected to be an upstanding citizen in the community and take care of his body, and so how does he spend his evenings? He spends it smoking up with his stoner friends. Granted, Randall adjusts his behaviour to whatever or whoever is around him, be it a certain group of friends, someone else's parents, or his teachers, but he also has learned how to walk to his own beat.

Dazed and Confused is also about young teenagers making the ugly transition from junior high to high school, and all of the physical, mental, and emotional torture which goes along with such changes. In this particular case, it's hazing and outright bullying which allow new students to be initiated into the dog-eat-dog world of high school. It's easy to forget that thirteen-year-olds and nineteen-year-olds are technically both teenagers, but that they also might as well come from different planets in terms of interests and plans for the future. The makers of *Dazed and Confused* aren't afraid to throw every possible age group of teenagers together, however, creating awkward situations of mingling, romance, and partying. Even though this film takes place in 1976, you may find that a lot of the lessons learned by the characters apply to today's youth more than thirty years later. So, hop in your time machine and take a ride

back to high school, 1970s-style.

Battle Royale aka Batoru Rowaiaru (2000)

Directed by Kinji Fukasaku

Reviewed by Nicholas Warren

Battle Royale is one of the most over-the-top, controversial and crazy movies of all time. –Although never officially released in North America, this film is widely available through Japanese bootlegs and the Internet and it is popular with older teens and college students.

The film takes place in Japan at the dawn of the last millennium. In this fictional portrayal, the Japanese economy is in ruins. There is 15% unemployment, 10 million unemployed people, and 800 000 students boycotting school. Fearing youthful rebellion, Japan's leaders enact the 'Millenium Educational Reform Act.' Part of this act allows the government to abduct an entire class of ninth graders, place them on an island, and force them to kill each other.

The result is an island full of teenagers running around slaughtering each other with weapons which range from crossbows to guns, to knives, to bare hands. Some teens immediately accept the challenge, planning to kill their enemies and



survive, while others refuse to take part and try to stop the game, and still others engage in a series of partnerships which result in more double and triple-crossing than a season of *Survivor*. The noble struggle of some teens to break the game adds an inkling of sanity to this otherwise insane film, as do the efforts of a couple to stay together. Unfortunately for the characters involved, however, there can be no happy endings in *Battle Royale*, as anyone who refuses to kill can be quickly dealt with by explosive collars placed around all the teens' necks.

Battle Royale sounds like, and is, a shocking film. It is full of violence, and perhaps in a league with *Sin City* and *300* for pure gratuitous destruction. Interestingly, however, the main reasons the film has not been released in North America are due to a spat over distribution rights, and the fact that the violence consists of teenagers killing teenagers. As the author of *Battle Royale Film* (<http://www.battleroyalefilm.net/movie/banned.html>) notes, such a film does not have a very receptive audience in the US, or, indeed, Canada, what with school shootings such as Columbine still fairly fresh in our minds.

Battle Royale really makes you think about the struggle to survive, natural instinct, the killing instinct, relationships and much more. Likewise, putting ninth-graders on an island in a no-holds-barred battle to the death, even with hokey dialogue, makes for a scholar-worthy exploratory

study of human nature. But should this film be viewed by YAs? My recommendation: despite it officially being more in the 'science fiction' than 'realistic fiction' genre, do not play this movie at a film club meeting, or recommend it to anyone in High School or younger. This is a film which really does deserve to be censored, at least until youth hit their 20s.

Fast Times at Ridgemont High (1982)

Written By Cameron Crowe

Directed By Amy Heckerling

Reviewed by Nicholas

Warren



Fast Times at Ridgemont High is a classic 80s teen movie which has no obvious central character or focus. Instead it is comprised of a number of teenage high school characters, from the popular single guy with a girlfriend, to the shy science nerd, to the surfer/stoner guy, to the 15-year-old girl who pretends she's 19 and samples sex. Sex is a major theme of the movie, with masturbation, premature ejaculation, straight sex and abortion all prominently featured; other themes include getting jobs, dealing with relationships, cars, money, and a smattering of academics.

All that young sexual activity has made *Ridgemont* a fairly censorable film, at least in the 1980s and 1990s. Where it crosses the line lies in the fact that it shows 'teenage' girls topless while having

sex, and depicts masturbation. While, even in 2007, *Ridgemont* remains a little over-the-top, it doesn't seem too offensive for today's teens. Films such as *There's Something About Mary*, *American Pie*, *Cruel Intentions* and others aimed at teens have made masturbation and toplessness minor issues at best in generalized North American society.

Ridgemont, largely due to its widespread character focus, is a rather anti-climactic movie and is low on character development. There is no massive singular event which all the characters share, save perhaps a short school dance, and the film doesn't end in a unifying way either. Instead, individual characters learn their lessons and continue with their lives, on their way to new lessons - much the way High School really is anyway.

Ridgemont does a decent job of depicting a generalized form of early to mid-1980s American High School reality, and, keeping in mind its sexual content, should be appropriate for most teens from High School age on up.

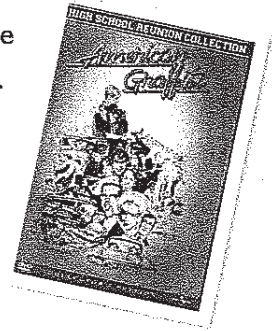
American Graffiti (1973)

Directed by George Lucas

Reviewed by Lucas Maxwell

This low budget nostalgia film introduced some relatively unknown actors who would all become famous in their own right. These actors included Harrison Ford, Richard Dreyfuss, Cindy Williams

and Charles Martin Smith. The film focuses on a single night in the lives of teens living in California in the early '60s. It is a well executed coming of age story for people who were growing up in a world that was on the brink of the Kennedy assassination, the Vietnam War, the Cuban missile crisis and the Civil Rights Movement. The movie is stuffed with popular rock 'n' roll music which is also on the fringe of losing its innocence to the influence of drugs and psychedelic culture.



American Graffiti has no substantial plotline. It wanders through the night following the exploits of several different teen characters as they make decisions for their future after high school. Lucas does an excellent job portraying the confusion and fear teens experience as they face the decisions and challenges that will bring them into adulthood. Although teens today cannot understand what it was like to live in the early 1960s this movie makes you wish you were there.

The Blob (1958)

Directed by: Irwin S. Yeaworth Jr.

Reviewed by Lucas Maxwell

A meteorite crashes in the woods and unleashes a gelatinous monster onto an unsuspecting town that consumes people whole. The main character, a teenager named Steve (played by an almost 30-

year-old Steve McQueen) discovers the monster after it has devoured an old farmer. Steve then tries in vain to warn the town of their impending peril only to be ignored and mocked. This movie was remade a few more times over the years, badly in my opinion. The original is much more fun to watch because it cleverly mixes science fiction, horror and teen delinquency, three very popular genres in the late 1950s. The blob eventually runs amok through the town, consuming various people and even a movie theatre at one

point. Meanwhile Steve and his drag racing friends try desperately to find a way to stop the ooze from growing and consuming the entire town. This is a fun movie that moves at a frantic pace through every minute.



Mean Girls (2004)

Directed by Mark Waters

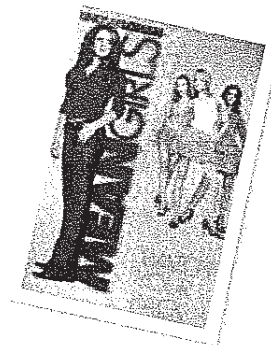
Reviewed By Becky Harris

I hate to admit it but I actually liked this movie. I usually cringe at the thought of stereotypical high school dramas where the protagonist will stop at nothing to fit in with the "cool" crowd. And of course, the popular girls are always beautiful and usually mean. And the protagonist always realizes in the end that being part of coolest the clique is not as important as being true to him or herself. Oh, please. Just thinking of that cheesy plot makes me nauseous.

OK, so *Mean Girls* isn't a whole

lot different. But it takes that tired plot and infuses it with likeable characters and lots of wit and humour - such as Gretchen's dad being the inventor of Toaster Strudels and bimbo Karen who thinks

it's OK to date her first cousin, just as long as it's not her second cousin.



The movie begins with Cady Heron (Lindsay Lohan), the daughter of two research zoologists, entering an American public school for the first time. Cady has spent the last ten years being home schooled in Africa. But she soon realizes that being in high school is not all that different from being amongst the wild African animals she's used to. On her first day she learns that it's survival of the fittest and where you sit in the cafeteria is crucial. She gets introduced to the nympho band geeks, nerdy Asians, the art geeks, and finally, The Plastics. The Plastics, headed by Queen Bee Regina George (Rachel McAdams), are at the top of the animal kingdom, high school royalty. And they are appropriately named. The members of this clique, Gretchen (Lacey Chabert) and Karen (Amanda Seyfried) are Barbie doll moulds of Regina and equally as cold and shallow.

Cady is encouraged by her newly-found friends Janis (Lizzy Caplan), an artsy goth with a mysterious hatred of Regina, and Damian (Daniel Fran-

zese), a loud and proud gay, that she should pretend to be friends with the Plastics and report back to them. But Cady gets sucked in. She loves being popular, even at the expense of alienating her true friends, her parents and herself. But soon her scheme is uncovered and she must face the truth. She has become a real-life Plastic: ruthless, heartless and shallow.

The characters have surprising depth and the parts are well acted. Although predictable, the movie is worth seeing. There, I've admitted it. I've admitted to liking a stereotypical high school race-for-popularity drama with a cheesy moral. Enjoy!

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Billy Norris became a teenage celebrity in 2003 as a film reviewer for Florida's St. Petersburg Times. Billy appeared on David Letterman and was interviewed on CNN in the summer of 2004; you can find the transcript of the CNN interview at <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0210/27/sm.08.html>. To read Billy's newspaper reviews, go to <http://www.sptimes.com/News/webspecials/billynorris/>