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## **Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron**

**Directors:** Lorna Cook and Kelly Asbury

**Year:** 2002

**Producer:** DreamWorks Animation

**Voice Actors:** Matt Damon, James Cromwell, Daniel Studi

**Music:** Hans Zimmer and Bryan Adams

The lesson should take place after watching the whole movie (77 minutes). Before watching, students are given handouts as a guidance as to which elements they should pay attention to. After watching, a teacher discusses with students several aspects introduced below. The lesson lasts 90 minutes, and it is divided into two parts and a conclusion. It is advised to use a self-made PowerPoint presentation with images that illustrate discussed issues.

**Topic:** The Reality of the Wild West and the Pursuit of Freedom in *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*

**Age Group:** teenagers (13-15 years old)

**Time:** 167 minutes (2 hours and 47 minutes) in total:

- 1 hour 17 minutes (film)
- 30 minutes (lesson part I)
- 45 minutes (lesson part II)
- 15 minutes (conclusions, opinions on the film, comments)

### **Methods:**

- discussion
- brainstorming
- pair work
- film analysis
- analysis of lyrics and quotes
- elements of lecture

### **Materials:**

- handouts
- film *Spirit: Stallion of the Cimarron*
- optional PowerPoint presentation

### **Aims:**

After the lesson a student should be able to:

- analyse the film and recognise the main problems it introduces
- characterise the natural environment of the Wild West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- point differences between native Americans and the U.S. Cavalry (the way they behave and how they live)
- analyse the lyrics of the songs and quotes
- describe and understand the feelings of the main character

- understand the importance of freedom
- understand and explain such terms as: noble savage, the frontier, European imperialism, Lakota tribe, industrial expansion, boyhood
- tell the differences between *Spirit* and other animations with an animal protagonist

## LESSON PLAN:

### PART I Environment and Civilisations of the Wild West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century

**time:** 30 minutes

#### 1. The natural environment of Cimarron

**time:** 7-10 minutes

After watching the film, the teacher asks students to compare in pairs their answers to questions in **Exercise 1** – enumerating elements of the natural environment presented in *Spirit*. Then he/she begins a discussion with the whole group and asks them to say what they observed.

#### Possible answers to Exercise 1:

- green forests, rivers, waterfalls, deserts, mountains, valleys, plains, stars in the sky
- animals: buffalos, horses, panthers, cougars, eagles

#### The teacher asks the following questions:

Do you recognise any of these places? Can you name them?

After the discussion, the teacher explains where the Cimarron, the land where the story of *Spirit* takes place, is situated. It is in western North America, where one may admire such sites as: **Grand Canyon, Monument Valley, Arches National Monument, or Glacier National Park**. All these national natural treasures may be noticed in *Spirit* as well.

#### 2. Native Americans vs the U.S. Cavalry – The American Frontier

**time:** 20-23 minutes

The teacher asks students to compare in pairs their answers to **Exercise 2** – filling in the table with differences between Indians and Cavalrymen. Then he/she begins a discussion with the whole group and asks them to say what they observed. The teacher may suggest the group focus on such aspects as: clothing, behaviours, attitude towards horses, weapon, place of living.

#### Possible answers to Exercise 2:

<b>INDIANS</b>	<b>CAVALRYMEN</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Little simple clothing</li> <li>▪ Nature lovers, brave, caring, funny, protective</li> <li>▪ As a saddle use piece of fabric/blanket</li> <li>▪ Use paint to mark a horse</li> <li>▪ Feed their horses</li> <li>▪ Playing with horses</li> <li>▪ Live in tents</li> <li>▪ Hatchets and knives as a weapon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Uniforms involving blue trousers, a jacket with golden buttons, black boots and a hat</li> <li>▪ Disciplined, self-confident, bold, cruel, serious</li> <li>▪ Use spurs and riding crops</li> <li>▪ Mark horses with burning iron</li> <li>▪ Starve rebellious horses</li> <li>▪ Live in a wooden fort</li> <li>▪ Drink alcohol</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build railways and try to tame wild horses</li> <li>▪ Shotguns as a weapon</li> </ul>
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The teacher asks the following questions:

Which one of these groups is presented positively?  
 Do you agree with such a representation? Why?  
 Would you say that Native Americans are idealised in *Spirit*?  
 How does the movie highlight the problem of racism?

After the discussion, the teacher gives a short lecture about the Wild West in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He/she introduces such terms as: **American frontier**, **noble savage**, and **European imperialism**. The teacher also draws attention to the **industrial expansion** of the USA in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The teacher may also ask the following questions:

What other elements of the Wild West do you know? (possible answers: cowboys, sheriff)  
 What other films about the Wild West have you seen? (possible answers: *Lucky Luke*, *Rango*, *The Lone Ranger*, *The Magnificent Seven*)  
 How industrial expansion was presented in *Spirit*? (possible answer: building railway)

In reference to **exercise 3**, the teacher asks the following question:

What are the 3 names of Indian tribes mentioned in *Spirit*? (answer: **Lakota**, **Cheyenne**, and **Crow**). The teacher draws students' attention to the fact that these are real names of the tribes that actually existed. He/she may also ask what other tribes they know.

Other questions possible to ask:

How do you feel about the term "noble savage"? Does the word "savage" indicate something?  
 In what other films can we find the portrayals of a noble savage? (possible answers: *Pocahontas*, *Avatar*, *Tarzan*)

**PART II The Nature of a Free Horse**

**time:** 45 minutes

**1. Spirit and other horses.**

**time:** 10 minutes

The teacher asks the students to change their seats and brainstorm with other partners. He/she asks them to compare their answers to **Exercise 4** – pointing out the differences and similarities between Spirit and tamed horses. Then he/she begins a discussion with the whole group and asks them to say what they observed. The teacher may suggest the group focus on such aspects as: equine coat colour (the colour of a horse), length of mane, attitude towards people.

Possible answers to Exercise 4:

SPIRIT	TAMED HORSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mustang</li> <li>• Long, beautiful mane</li> <li>• Strong and handsome</li> <li>• Yellowish colour (probably dun)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• unknown breed</li> <li>• horses of Cavalry – cut mane</li> <li>• horses of Indians – long mane</li> <li>• grey, dark colours (apart from Rain)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hostile towards people, doesn't trust them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• obedient to people, occasionally object to them</li> <li>• Rain loves Little Creek</li> <li>• protective and sympathetic towards Spirit</li> </ul>
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The teacher may also ask the following questions:

Which horse did you like the best? Why?

How does Spirit's appearance reflect his "wild nature"?

Why does Spirit's attitude towards people differ so much from the attitude of the other horses?

## 2. Characteristics of Spirit and motif of boyhood

**time:** 10 minutes

The teacher asks students to compare in pairs their answers to **Exercise 5** – pointing out the characteristics of Spirit. Then he/she begins a discussion with the whole group and asks them to share what they observed.

Possible answers to Exercise 5:

Spirit is: brave, protective, reckless, curious, stubborn, merciful (doesn't kill a cougar), strong, adventurous, troublemaker, clever, loving, proactive.

The teacher asks the following questions:

Did you like the protagonist? Why?

Do you identify with Spirit?

Can you think of any other male protagonist that shares Spirit's personality? (possible answers: Harry Potter, Han Solo, Aragorn, Aladdin, Flynn Rider etc.)

After the brainstorm, the teacher draws the students' attention to the fact that the motif of **boyhood** frequently appears in films for children. Moreover, the personality of the male protagonists often overlap.

## 3. The need for freedom and home

**time:** 25 minutes

The teacher asks students to answer the question in **Exercise 6**: May an eagle symbolise something? What is it? (possible answer: Spirit's freedom). He/she may also ask: When does the eagle appear in the film? (possible answer: every time when Spirit was free and close to his home).

The teacher writes the following quote on the board: "For the first time in my life I had a heart torn in two ways" and asks students when the quote appeared in the movie. (answer: when Spirit wanted to come back home but couldn't leave Rain)

The teacher asks the following questions:

Where is your home? What does make it your home? How do you feel at home? Is it true that a home is where your family lives?

On the basis of the quote above – where is Spirit's home? (possible answer: where people/horses he loves are)

In reference to **Exercise 7** – the analysis of the song "Sound the Bugle" by Bryan Adams, the teacher asks the students to locate the song in the film and explain what Spirit's situation

was. (answer: the Spirit was captured and locked in a wagon; he probably believed that he would never see his herd again)

In reference to the lyrics, the teacher asks the following questions:

How does Bryan Adams' song reflect Spirit's emotions?

How does Spirit call himself in the song? (answer: a soldier) Why?

When does Spirit's mood change? (answer: "Then from on high - somewhere in the distance/There's a voice that calls - remember who you are")

What is the message of the song? (possible answers: to remember who you are, or that freedom is worth fighting for)

Do you know any other films or books with the motif of freedom? (possible answers: *The Hunger Games*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Tangled*, *Frozen*, etc.)

The teacher may conclude the second part of the lesson by explaining that freedom is a significant need in human life. It is important not only to be free physically, but also to be able to feel free with being who we are.

### **Conclusions, opinions on the film, additional comments**

**time:** 15 minutes

#### **1. Spirit vs other animal protagonists**

The teacher asks the following questions:

What other animal protagonists do you know? (possible answers: Garfield, Lady and Tramp, Nemo, animals from *Madagascar*, etc.)

How do they differ from Spirit? (possible answer: they are **humanized**, they can speak and behave like real humans sometimes; Spirit calls people "two-leggeds")

Would you prefer Spirit to be more human-like? Why?

#### **2. General opinions on the film**

The teacher asks the following questions:

Did you like the film? Why?

Would you change anything in the film?

What did you like the most?

How did the film make you feel?

Would you recommend the film to your friends?