Bringing teaching, learning and research to life

Politics & International Relations
Teaching with Documentary Video
Content Type

Documentary videos generally last for approximately one hour and explore in depth a thematic issue. They examine topics that are of significant importance for politics, history, or society. Documentaries set out the context and history of the subject being discussed, using narration, interviews, and film clips to provide the background to the topic. They provide in-depth analysis that is presented in an engaging manner. They can be used in the classroom either as a whole lesson or divided into two parts for two lessons. Instructors can use them toward the end of a course or module as a way to wrap up or summarize a topic or could use them to begin a series of classes or independent research projects on a topic that the documentary covers.

Winston Churchill: Winning the War, Losing the Peace

http://sk.sagepub.com/video/winston-churchill-winning-the-war-losing-the-peace?seq=1

In this documentary, the British Broadcasting Corporation explores the tension between the esteem in which Winston Churchill is held in relation to the UK’s role in the Second World War and his domestic political record after that war. The documentary explores the reasons why Churchill was not re-elected immediately after the War, discussing the political and societal reasons for his domestic unpopularity despite the international acclaim he received at that time for the UK’s role in defeating Nazi Germany.

Suggested Courses or Topics

This documentary is relevant for courses focusing on politics, modern history, war studies, or international relations. It is likely to be of particular interest for modules that focus on the Second World War, from any disciplinary lens, or for those that focus on elections or domestic politics and the impact that international affairs has on that area.

Classroom Clips

Listed below are a few examples of clips that focus on key concepts:

- Segment 1 introduces the issues that led to Churchill’s losing the post-War election, with particular emphasis on him representing a return to the status quo and on why so many people from the working class wanted significant change. The segment is important for understanding the political context in the UK before, during, and immediately after the Second World War.
- Segment 3 charts Churchill’s response to Hitler during his rise to power. The clip is important for understanding how and why Churchill led the UK war effort in the way that he did. There are interesting competing points of view as to whether it was Churchill or Chamberlain who was responsible for the UK’s response to Nazi Germany.
- Segment 4 juxtaposes the difference between Churchill’s speeches during the war and during the elections. Using clips of famous speeches, it analyses why the war speeches are some of the most famous in the world, and why Churchill failed to provide similarly rousing speeches during the election. There is interesting discussion of the extent to which even his wartime speeches were as strong as they are now held out to be.
- Segments 5 and 7 provide two different case studies on Churchill’s policies that shine a light on why he should not be judged only on his wartime efforts. Segment 5 explores his relationship with the working class, particularly with the miners. It offers insights into his approach to industrial relations, and why he was deeply unpopular with working class voters. Segment 7 explores Churchill’s approach to colonialism and to racial and ethnic minorities. It shows how his views and policies stand in stark contrast to the ways in which he is portrayed as a war leader.
Research Assignment

See below for some example assignments that you might use for students

The documentary provides many different examples of why a large number of UK citizens did not vote for Churchill after the Second World War. Find and research into another example of how a successful engagement in an international war has been followed by a similar disaffection within a politician’s home country and then summarize the similarities and differences to Churchill’s failure to be re-elected after the Second World War.

Classroom Discussion

Here are some example questions that might be used for in-class discussion.

The documentary focuses on domestic matters that were of crucial importance in the UK post-War election, including post-War construction, housing, the economy, industrial relations, and issues relating to class. How did Churchill respond to those issues? What was different between his approach and that of the Labour Party? How do you understand the difference between Churchill as a leader during wartime and his approach to national policies? Do you think he approached the election with the same commitment and drive as he did the War? Sir Max Hastings argues that any leader other than Churchill would have struck a deal with the Nazis—do you agree with his reasoning? How would you assess Churchill as a politician? Would you place equal emphasis on his international and national records?