

TO: Parents and Students
FR: Pam Wagner, PrepUS History Teacher
RE: Showing of the Movie *The Patriot*
Date: 10/20/14

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The movie *The Patriot* will be shown in our US History class as part of our study of the American Revolution. This 2000 film tells the story of a southern gentleman who becomes reluctantly involved in the American Revolution and is rated "R" for violence. A separate activity is available if you wish to have your child complete this in lieu of watching the film. If you would prefer to have your child complete the alternate assignment, please note this in the space provided below. I have included a copy of a movie review and the IMDB Parents' Guide for your perusal.

Please feel free to call or email me if you have any questions or concerns about this film.

Sincerely,

Pam Wagner

I grant permission for my son/daughter, _____, to watch the movie *The Patriot* in US History.

Date of Signature

Signature of Parent/Guardian

Please have my son/daughter, _____, complete the alternate assignment in lieu of watching the film *The Patriot*.

Date of Signature

Signature of Parent/Guardian

The Patriot

By Roger Ebert / Jun 28, 2000



"The Patriot" is a fable arguing the futility of pacifism, set against the backdrop of the Revolutionary War. It is rousing and entertaining, and you get your money's worth, but there isn't an idea in it that will stand up to thoughtful scrutiny. The British are seen as gentlemanly fops or sadistic monsters, and the Americans come in two categories: brave or braver. Those who have a serious interest in the period will find it a cartoon; those raised on summer action movies will find it more stimulating than most.

Mel Gibson stars, in a powerful and effective performance, as a widower named Benjamin Martin with seven children. He saw enough of battle in the French and Indian Wars, and was frightened by what he learned about himself. He counsels a treaty with King George. Asked about his principles by an old comrade in arms (Chris Cooper), he replies, "I'm a parent. I haven't got the luxury of principles." But he gets some in a hurry, after the monstrous British Col. William Tavington (Jason Isaacs), arrests Martin's eldest son Gabriel (Heath Ledger) and takes him away to be hanged, after first shooting another of Martin's sons just for the hell of it and burning down his house. Since Martin had merely been treating the wounded of both sides in his home, this seems excessive, and in the long run turns out to be extremely unwise for the British, since Martin goes on to more or less single-handedly mastermind their defeat. There must have been many British officers less cruel--but none would have served the screenplay's purpose, which is to show Martin driven berserk by grief, rage and the need for revenge.

The following sequence is the film's most disturbing. Martin and his sons hide in the woods and ambush Tavington and his soldiers; eventually the battle comes down to hand-to-hand fighting (with Martin wielding a tomahawk). Gabriel is freed, and the younger boys get a taste for blood ("I'm glad I killed them!" one of the tykes cries.). The movie's scenes of carnage have more impact than the multiple killings in a film like "Shaft," because they are personal, not technical; individual soldiers, frightened and ill-prepared, are fighting for their lives, while in the modern action movies, most of the victims are pop-up arcade targets.

The big players in the war (George Washington, King George) are far offscreen, although we do meet Gen. Cornwallis (Tom Wilkinson), a British leader who promotes a "gentlemanly" conduct of the war and rebukes Tavington for his brutality. Still, when the Americans refuse to "fight fair" and adopt hit-and-run guerrilla tactics against the British (who march in orderly ranks into gunfire), Cornwallis bends enough to authorize the evil colonel to take what steps are necessary to bring down Martin (by now legendary as "the Ghost").

The movie's battle scenes come in two flavors--harrowing and unlikely. Two battles near the beginning of the film are conveniently fought in open fields visible from the upper windows of houses, so onlookers have excellent seats for the show and can supply a running narration. No doubt revolutionary battles were fought right there in the pasture, but would Benjamin Martin allow his kids to stand in the windows, or tell them to hide in the barn? The "real" battles are grueling tests of men and horses, as soldiers march into withering fire, and the survivors draw their swords or fix their bayonets for blood-soaked combat in close quarters. These battles seem anarchic and pitiless, and respect the movie convention that bitter rivals will sooner or later find themselves face to face. The scenes are well-staged by the director, Roland Emmerich, working from a script by Robert Rodat, the same man who wrote "Saving Private Ryan," with its equally appalling battle scenes.

IMDB Parents' Guide

Violence & Gore

Many battle scenes with brutal gunshots, slashings, and stabbings. Countless men are shot in the head and chest, and almost every time there is a spray of blood. Martin kills many soldiers with his tomahawk (blood occasionally shown).

After soldiers kill his son, Martin repeatedly hacks the dead corpse of a British soldier, at least a dozen times. We do not see the hatchet actually hitting, but we see blood spraying everywhere, soaking him in the man's blood.

A cannon fires and, in a close-up shot, takes a man's head off in slow motion. Gore flies, and we see the bloody stump of his neck for a second. Elsewhere, men's limbs are blown off by cannonballs as well.

A man is stabbed violently in the neck. Another man has a hatchet flung into his skull, which splits and spills blood as he crumples to the ground.

A young child is shot in the back by a British officer. We see a large bloody bullet hole in his shirt. His family cradles him as he dies.

As the camera pans over a camp, we see a soldier after his leg has been amputated. There is a very bloody stump. He, the table, and the doctors are all covered in blood.

The British systematically execute wounded Americans without a second thought. Not shown, but very disturbing.

A church is burned down with innocent people inside. Not graphic, but very emotional.

Frightening/Intense Scenes

Children are often in mortal danger. Sometimes they are killed heartlessly.

Many brutally realistic battle scenes include lots of death and gore.

A man thought to be dead rises suddenly.

In a very emotional sequence, a church full of innocent men, women, and children is burned to the ground.