

# Documentary

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*The primary author is the individual who drafted the first version of this section; a section that could have been modified since it was originally published.*

Documentary films are nonfiction films designed to show a story of actual events, of an event or person, and sometimes for historical records. Today, documentary films are much more entertaining to watch with all of the technology advances in the film industry as well as added drama than they were years ago. It seems that every year there are more and more documentary films and TV series because of how much these films interest the audience.

Although documentaries and fiction films both have a story behind them, documentary films have a real story with actual events and truth behind it. Documentary films can be used as a way to teach people on subject matter within an hour or two, or in a series of films. These film topics have an endless range of subject matter from health techniques, to sports, to political sciences.

Depending on the director and how the film is created, some documentaries are very one side. This can sway the audience to the author's beliefs. Because of this, many times documentary films are associated with propaganda films. For example, Nazi Germany was very involved with propaganda films. Many of them, such as [Triumph des Willens](#) (1935), boasted the Nazi party and swaying the public and audience to the Nazi party.

Documentary films can date back to the earliest films that were shot. One of the first films to ever be created and the first by the Lumière brothers is [Sortie des Usines Lumière à Lyon](#), which was a short film of workers leaving the Lumiere factor in 1895. Although it is said to be a documentary film, when watching the film, if you look at how the workers are dressed you can see that they are wearing the finest cloths that they own. Also none of them walk towards the camera or even look at it. The film does document workers leaving the building, but it is also somewhat staged seeing that none of them would ever be wearing their finest cloths in a factory and none of them walked past the camera blocking the view.

Documentary films were originally films showing actually events and footage that either happened or are currently happening. [Nanook of the North](#) (1922) which shows the struggles of a family living off the land in the artic of northern Quebec is an example. In this film, director Robert J. Flaherty followed the family documenting all of the obstacles that one would face attempting to live in the Arctic. Although it is considered a documentary, portions of the film would fall into the genre of docudrama.



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Photo Credit: Frank Capra directed the *Why We Fight* documentary series.

Today, there are documentary films that are recreations of events such as the 2004 Disney film *Miracle* which is a sports docudrama about the 1980 US Olympic ice hockey team. These films were created using actors, recreating the events that the team went through prior and up to the 1980 winter Olympics. Although this was a recreation it is considered to be extremely historically accurate to the actual events that took place. Films like this are called docudramas seem to be much more appealing to children which create a larger based audience.

Documentaries don't typically have to be one single film; sometimes they are broken up into a series. One case in point is *Why We Fight* (1942-1945). Directed and produced by Frank Capra this series is documentary, informational, and sometimes even a propagandistic. The films were originally created to show the soldiers why they needed to fight and help motivate them. But, eventually, *Why We Fight* was shown to the public to also motivate them to support the troops. The first film in the series [Prelude to War](#) (1942) won the 1942 Academy Award for Documentary Feature. Watching the film today, it looks as if it were made by a young film student, but, at the time, the film techniques used in creating it was ground breaking for documentary films and left people on the edge of their seats.

There are also documentaries that are used as propaganda against war. Michael Moore's [Fahrenheit 9/11](#) (2004) is one example. The film is seen to have very liberal views on the topic and created a lot of controversy when it was released. [Fahrenheit 9/11](#) (2004) was produced in response to Moore's film. *Fahrenheit 9/11* details many conspiracy theories that took place prior to 11 September 2001. Although it was controversial, Moore did ask some good questions about events leading up to, on, and after September 11.

Documentary films have evolved over time and continue to do so. It will be fascinating to see what the directors and producers will be creating in the years to come. For movie critics or just another Netflix user, I think it is safe to say that they all are anticipating the arrival of new documentary films.

## Works Consulted

Aufderheide, Patricia. *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2007. Print.

This book was mad for me. It has everything that I am looking for all in one small little book. The book has everything from defining Documentary, to terms, history, government propaganda, and even a list of the authors 100 "best" documentaries.

Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: A History of the Non-fiction Film*. New York: Oxford UP, 1993. Print.

This was an older book and I found it a bit hard to find what I was looking for. I'll have to spend more time on it and more detail going through to try and find something useful.



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Photo Credit: Frank Capra directed the *Why We Fight* documentary series.

Barsam, Richard M. *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History*. Bloomington: Indiana U, 1992. Print.

This book seems like it has almost everything on the history of documentary films. They have all the dates and times when the documentary films changed all for different reason, whether it was war propaganda films or cinema verite, etc. I'm going to have to find out what to focus on to be able to use this book to my full advantage.

Bordwell, David. *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*. Berkeley: U of California, 2006. Print.

This book didn't have a lot of information on the history or background of documentaries. What it did do though, is talk about different documentary films on pages 76-78. It gave me a better understanding of what to look for in other documentaries and how to incorporate it into my chapter.

"[A Brief History of Documentary Forms](#)." RSS. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This site was much more zeroed in on topic and produced more valuable research on topics such as Nanook of The North.

Capra, Frank. *Frank Capra: The Name above the Title; an Autobiography*. New York: New York, 1971. Print.

This book is an autobiography on Frank Capra. It proves to have much information on himself from a historical stand point.

"[Chronology of Documentary History](#)." *Chronology of Documentary History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This website had a great break down or timeline that includes information on Nanook of the North (1922). Along with some great historical facts that I learned.(the 1935 section)

"[Documentary Archive](#)." *Documentary Film History*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This site had brief history/information on documentary's, which were broken up about every 20 years or so. I found it to be informing to expand my research from it.

"[Documentary Films](#)." *Documentary Films*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Oct. 2014.

This cite had a ton of information on all different documentary's along with the creators. Making it real easy to expand my research off of this site.



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Photo Credit: Frank Capra directed the *Why We Fight* documentary series.

"[EarlyCinema.com](#)." *EarlyCinema.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 08 Oct. 2014.

Talked about the history of the Lumière brothers what and how they created the camera and films.

Edelstein, David. "[Edelstein: How Documentary Became the Most Exciting Kind of Filmmaking](#)." *Vulture*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This film was basically personal options on the film industry. It gave me a different look into the study of film.

Espejo, Roman. *The Film Industry*. Detroit: Greenhaven, 2009. Print.

I couldn't find anything on documentary films in this book but there was a really cool article in the book about why more people go to the movies during a recession.

"[Fahrenheit 9/11](#)." *Top Documentary Films RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This cited described the film and talked about how one-sided it was. It also had clips and trailers from the film.

Henderson, Brian, Ann Martin, and Lee Amazonas. *Film Quarterly: Forty Years, a Selection*. Berkeley: U of California, 1999. Print.

This book had an entire chapter devoted to documentary films. The down side is that this chapter is about a handful of major articles that were written and narrowed down, along with the author's opinion. The plus side is that were many facts, names and terms that I'll have to look up which should lead to more.

"[History](#)." *Top Documentary Films RSS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This cite just had a bunch of films that seem very interesting that I would like to look further into, whether it be for this class or in my personal time.

"[Lone Survivor True Story vs Movie - Real Marcus Luttrell, Mike Murphy](#)." *HistoryvsHollywood.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This cite went into detail about how the film was different from the actual events that took place.



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Photo Credit: Frank Capra directed the *Why We Fight* documentary series.

["The Lumiere Brothers' First Films 1/7."](#) *YouTube*. YouTube, n.d. Web. 09 Oct. 2014.

This was a short film documentary on the Lumière brothers. It gave a short history but showed a few of their films.

["Miracle Movie - True Story of the 1980 US Olympic Hockey Team and Coach Herb Brooks."](#)

*ChasingtheFrog.com*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

This cited explained how accurate the movie was to the historical events that took place during the 1980 winter Olympics.

Moore, Michael. *Here Comes Trouble: Stories from My Life*. New York: Grand Central Pub. Large Print, 2011. Print.

Read how crazy Michael Moore is. He has a great drive and determination but the things he says to people is just crazy!

["Nanook of the North - Robert Flaherty \(1922\)."](#) *Nature Documentaries*. N.p., n.d. Web. 16 Oct. 2014.

Information on the movie on Nanook of The North. Along with a link to watch the entire film for free.



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