

# HUMN 14: THE ART OF PEACE: NARRATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF PACIFISM

## Foothill College Course Outline of Record

Heading	Value
Effective Term:	Summer 2025
Units:	4
Hours:	4 lecture per week (48 total per quarter)
Advisory:	One of the following strongly recommended: ENGL 1A or 1AH or ESLL 26.
Degree & Credit Status:	Degree-Applicable Credit Course
Foothill GE:	Area 3: Arts & Humanities
Transferable:	CSU/UC
Grade Type:	Letter Grade (Request for Pass/No Pass)
Repeatability:	Not Repeatable

## Student Learning Outcomes

- Explain how the ideas and processes emphasized in Peace Studies as a field, and how this overlaps with broadly Humanistic goals.
- Discuss how the practices of art analysis, interpretation, and evaluation, seen through a Peace Studies lens, can uniquely illuminate art that deals with Peace and War.
- Synthesize critical thinking strategies about art and culture, and apply these strategies to a holistic analytical framework that helps students critically analyze how culture defines conflict, resolution, and pragmatism.
- Synthesize critical thinking, imaginative, cooperative and empathetic abilities as whole persons in order to contextualize knowledge and make meaning.

## Description

When conflict is assumed as necessary to storytelling, how does art conceptualize peaceful revolution and resistance to war? Through the examination of literature, film, performance art, and video games, this course examines the representation of non-violent movements in the popular imagination. Via the lens of major debates in peace studies, the course traces how race, ethnicity, and class disrupt the traditional narratives of war and peace.

## Course Objectives

The student will be able to:

1. Engage in critical thinking about representation of history, particularly peace and war
2. Stimulate curiosity about intellectual and artistic life
3. Broaden perspectives on the ideological and practical infrastructures around peace-making and war-making

4. Apply critical approaches to the analysis of various modes of cultural production and distribution in relation to the depiction of peace movements
5. Explain the relationship between capitalism, mass art, the military-industrial infrastructure
6. Use diverse historical periods and cultural traditions as a framework for a more complex understanding of conflict and stasis in the contemporary world
7. Analyze cultural production as an instrument of both social control and ideological change, and understand how this analysis is problematized by cultural production understood as a market driven commodity
8. Develop the habit of learning and responding to new ideas and challenges
9. Think through moral and ethical problems and examine one's own assumptions
10. Improve both oral and written communication, especially through critical reading and analysis

## Course Content

1. The theories of peace
  - a. Buddhist, Jain, and Hindu perspectives
  - b. Abrahamic pacifist sects/theology (Jewish, Christian, Muslim)
  - c. Secular contemporary philosophical concepts (absolute vs. contingent pacifism)
2. Ancient theories of war, refracted through theories of peace and classical art
  - a. Bushido and Samurai culture; relationship with Zen Buddhism
  - b. Classic Japanese paintings and poems
  - c. "The Art of War", Daoist theology
  - d. Classic Warring States period art
  - e. Augustine's just war theory
3. Critical pacifist perspectives on modern political/ideological infrastructure
  - a. The Geneva Convention
  - b. Just war theory (e.g., as taught at West Point Military Academy)
  - c. Justification by Israel using just war theory
  - d. The Hague and the ICC
4. Genre criticism: Revenge melodramas; peace as foolish or weak
  - a. Revenge melodrama in context of war (e.g., Shakespeare, *Braveheart*, *Rambo* series)
  - b. "Woke" revenge melodrama in modern film (female and POC protagonists)
  - c. Marvel films, Tolkien, and fantasy framings of war as necessary for existence itself
  - d. Ubiquity of WWII as archetypal necessary war
  - e. Narrative role of pacifist characters in these films; hero's journey from weakness to strength through violence
5. Genre criticism: War as epic tragedy; peace as impossible
  - a. Classic war paintings, China and Japan
  - b. Classic war poems, India and Greece
  - c. Classic war novels, the modern age (e.g., *All Quiet on the Western Front* or *The Killer Angels*)
  - d. Overtly Buddhist war films (e.g., Zhang Yimou's *To Live*, Kurosawa's *Ran*)
  - e. Oliver Stone and American Vietnam films

- f. Role of empathy and tragedy in these works in creating a sense that peace is impossible, given the scope and ubiquity of war
- 6. Practical pacifism in art
  - a. Restorative justice theory
  - b. [Dead Man Walking](#) and/or other anti-capital punishment films/novels
  - c. [A Long Night's Journey Into Day](#) and/or other depictions of South Africa's Peace and Reconciliation Commission
  - d. The question of peace-making in mass art; analysis of box office takings and best-sellers lists, and the paucity of any significant peace-making stories
- 7. Literary criticism
  - a. Joseph Campbell and the hero's journey
  - b. Stanley Fish, [Paradise Lost](#), and the "temptation of plot"
  - c. Marxist perspectives on base/superstructure theory
- 8. Peace studies debates
  - a. Peace studies/feminist alliance
  - b. Role of religion in peace-making/war-making
  - c. Resources, environmentalism, and peace in the face of basic material inequity
  - d. Evolution, survival instinct, and the question of whether war is "natural"
  - e. Racial justice movements and violence; peace and war as effective/ineffective in pursuit of justice
  - f. Islamophobia, the under-representation of Islamic peace movements

Homer, [The Iliad](#)

[Bushido/the Way of the Samurai](#)

Martin Luther King, [Letter from a Birmingham Jail](#)

[The United Nations Declaration on Human Rights](#)

[The Geneva Conventions of 12 August, 1949](#)

Sun Tzu, [The Art of War](#)

Laozi, [Dao de jing](#)

[Bhagavad Gita](#)

[Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report](#)

#### **Suggested texts:**

Andrew Fiala, [Transformative Pacifism: Critical Theory and Practice](#)

Phillip Hallie, [Lest Innocent Blood be Shed](#)

Ahmed Salah and Alex Mayyasi, [You Are Under Arrest for Masterminding the Egyptian Revolution: A Memoir](#)

Desmond Tutu, [No Future Without Forgiveness](#)

John Kleinen, [Framing "the Other". A critical review of Vietnam war movies and their representation of Asians and Vietnamese](#)

Mohandas K. Gandhi, [The Story of my Experiments with Truth](#)

#### **Novels and films:**

Michael Shaara, [The Killer Angels](#)

J.R.R. Tolkien, [The Lord of the Rings](#)

Erich Maria Remarque, [All Quiet on the Western Front](#)

Marvel films (e.g., [Iron Man](#) or [The Avengers](#))

Shakespeare, [Macbeth](#) and [King Lear](#)

Oliver Stone's Vietnam trilogy

Zhang Yimou, [To Live](#)

Richard Attenborough, [Ghandi](#)

Martin Scorsese, [Kundun](#)

Akira Kurosawa, [Ran](#)

Mel Gibson, [Hacksaw Ridge](#) and [The Patriot](#)

Sylvester Stallone, [Rambo](#) (2008)

## **Lab Content**

Not applicable.

## **Special Facilities and/or Equipment**

When taught as an online section, students and faculty need ongoing and continuous internet and email access.

## **Method(s) of Evaluation**

Methods of Evaluation may include but are not limited to the following:

Exams

Evaluation of contributions to class discussions

Formal essay

## **Method(s) of Instruction**

Methods of Instruction may include but are not limited to the following:

Lecture presentations

In-class discussions

## **Representative Text(s) and Other Materials**

Wood, Houston. [Current Debates in Peace and Conflict Studies](#). 2017.

Although this text is older than the suggested "5 years or newer" standard, it remains seminal in this area of study.

**Open source foundational texts:**

## **Types and/or Examples of Required Reading, Writing, and Outside of Class Assignments**

1. Weekly assigned readings from 5-50 pages drawn from both primary and secondary sources

2. Brief philosophical and literary critical readings designed to familiarize students with ongoing debates and perspectives in trauma theory and the aesthetics of violence
3. Bi-weekly one- to two-page essays requiring summary, interpretation, analysis, and synthesis of both original and secondary texts

## **Discipline(s)**

Humanities