

Children of Glory

(Szabadság, szerelem) [Hungary, 2006, Subtitled]

Study Notes



Directed by: Krisztina Goda

Certificate: 15

Running time: 123 mins

Suitable for: GCSE Citizenship, Media, History, PE

Keywords: historic event, political unrest, soviet era, revolution, Hungarian cinema

Synopsis:

Children of Glory tells the story of Karcsi Szabó, a Hungarian water polo athlete who reluctantly becomes embroiled in his nation's uprising against the occupying Soviet forces when he meets a passionate student turned political activist. Karcsi's growing involvement in the revolution conflicts with his training for the upcoming Melbourne Olympics and with his family and teammates, who feel he should be focusing on the sport. Karcsi's wavering allegiances are tested as his Hungarian countrymen die in their battle for freedom, while the water polo team make it to the Olympic semi-final against the USSR, an event set to have a definitive and controversial place in political and sporting history.

Before Viewing

The film is set during the 1956 revolution of Hungary against the occupying Soviet Union. Research Hungary's post-war history.

- What factors led to the revolutionary uprising of 1956?
- How did the uprising resolve itself? To what extent was normality restored?
- Who were the key political figures?
- How did Hungary's Olympic water polo team's victory over the Soviets impact upon the two countries?

After viewing

Some viewers have remarked that the film's ending is ambiguous and that many true events are 'watered down' and 'over-simplified' so it could appeal more to western audiences. Certainly the trailer accentuates the more action-packed elements of the film.

1. Having looked into the events of 1956, to what extent do you feel the statements above are true?
2. Why do you think Viki's fate is not made entirely clear in the film?
3. How are western powers such as Britain or America portrayed? What is made in the film of their lack of intervention?
4. Are the events of the uprising accurately presented? Are any true events or occurrences omitted or simplified? If so, what do you think are the reasons for these alterations? Do you feel they harm the integrity of the film?

Hollywood meets Hungary

This film upon its release intrigued many because it was co-created by two filmmakers whose previous credits (at first glance) were wildly different in tone and theme to what *Children of Glory* appeared to be about. Look at these selected filmographies of screenwriter Joe Eszterhas and producer Andrew Vajna (both native Hungarians).

Joe Eszterhas

Burn Hollywood Burn (1997)
Showgirls (1995)
Jade (1995)
Sliver (1993)
Basic Instinct (1992)
Music Box (1987)
Jagged Edge (1985)
Flashdance (1983)

Andrew Vajna

Terminator 3/Salvation (2003/09)
Basic Instinct 2 (2006)
An American Rhapsody (Hungary 2001)
Burn Hollywood Burn (1997)
Evita (1996)
Nixon (1995)
Judge Dredd (1995)
Die Hard With A Vengeance (1993)
Red Heat (1988)
Rambo Trilogy (1982–88)

5. Aside from their nationalities, is there anything in their previous work that is similar in any way to *Children of Glory*, either in terms of narrative or tone?
6. Recall the opening sequence of *Children of Glory*. Excluding for now the Hungarian language spoken, does this sequence feel like a Hollywood feature? Consider pace of editing, camerawork and the score (incidentally, the opening scenes of *Red Heat* feel very similar).
7. Are there any other moments in the film that feel more Hollywood than Hungary?

Cinematic Revolutions

Many other real-life political struggles are represented on film. What generic conventions do such films share with *Children of Glory*? Start by watching the trailers or reading the synopses for the following films (the historical setting is in brackets):

- *Lust, Caution*, 2007 (Japanese-occupied Shanghai, WWII)
 - *The Lives of Others*, 2007 (East Germany up until the fall of the Berlin Wall)
 - *The Dreamers*, 2003 (student strikes in 1968 Paris)
 - *Goodbye Lenin!* 2003 (East Germany freed of Communism)
 - *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, 1988 (Prague Spring and the USSR invasion of Czechoslovakia)
8. Are the films based on true events, or are they fictional stories set against the backdrop of revolution?
 9. What impressions do you form of the central protagonists in each film? Consider social/occupational/political status and gender.
 10. What appears to be at stake in these films, both personally for the characters and socially?
 11. Do you feel that these films all offer a biased representation of historical events? Explain your answer in detail.

Suggested Activities

12. Create a trailer or a treatment for a Hollywood film inspired by '*Children of Glory*'. Can you think of any other political rivalries that have exploded into the sporting/competitive arena? Who might play the two lead roles? What current or historic conflict might be substituted for the Hungarian Uprising?
13. Write a review of the film either as a western critic or a Hungarian critic. What differences in reception might you anticipate?

Useful Sites

- www.rferl.org/content/article/1068204.html discusses the events of the controversial Olympic water polo semi-final depicted in the film as well as a Quentin Tarantino–produced documentary that has been made about the event (Freedom’s Fury)
- See the trailer for Freedom’s Fury at www.youtube.com/watch?v=fgKiTLbORJU

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