

# HOMELAND STORIES: Movies, Stars and Home Grown Heroes

## Character Education

- To increase awareness of the propagandistic nature of movies and other media
- To evaluate the role of serving causes in character development
- To appreciate the Canadian tradition of service to country

## Facts

- 1.1 million Canadians served in the Army, Navy and Air Force in WWII of whom more than 45,000 died
- Actors Lorne Greene (*Bonanza*) and James Doohan (Scottie in *Star Trek*) served in the Canadian Armed Forces during WWII as did writer Pierre Berton
- Canadian-born actors Raymond Massey, Faye Wray, Glenn Ford, Hume Cronyn and Walter Pidgeon starred in many Hollywood war movies
- The Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit scooped the world with its coverage of the invasion of Sicily, D-Day, the Liberation of Paris and the meeting of the Allies at the Elbe River
- Dime Comic's hero "Johnny Canuck", created by a 16 year old Canadian, captured international attention when he socked Hitler in the jaw

## Before the Reading

- Discuss why the news differs on TV channels or in newspapers? Isn't news just news?
- Comic book heroes take on super-sized villains. List some of the best villains of comic books and describe what makes them so easy to hate.
- Why do actors and actresses often serve do-good causes? List some of the most famous spokespersons for specific causes.

## HOMELAND MINUTES



Mary Pickford

### The Canadian Roots of America's Sweetheart

Blonde-haired movie star Mary Pickford (1892–1979) born at 211 University Avenue in Toronto where SickKids Hospital sits today had an international popularity in her time that goes well

beyond what any movie star today commands. Forget Katherine Hepburn, Marilyn Monroe, Sandra Bullock, Jennifer Aniston and Angelina Jolie. Mary Pickford, America's Sweetheart, outdid them all.

Mary Pickford starred in over 50 movies at a time when movies were first making their way into North America's heartland. She quickly became a household name in Canada and the US. However, by the 1930s when she could no longer play the child and ingénue roles of her youth, even after founding the United Artists Studio with her husband the action hero Douglas Fairbanks Jr. and silent movie star Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford was retired from movies by the ticking of the clock.

In spite of her personal difficulties with aging, with marital difficulties and with the movie industry, when WWII beckoned, Mary Pickford was there to help. In

May 1942 she visited DIL, an Ajax Munitions Plant, with American movie star Ralph Bellamy to promote their Victory Bond Campaign.

In May 1943 she was there for her own cause. The Gerrard Business Men's Association in Toronto and Lions International were prepared to help her raise funds to aid British War Victims. They sold \$1.00 raffle tickets for a bungalow at 90 Glenwood Crescent in Toronto. Mary toured Ontario to aid the cause. Eventually they raised \$250,000.

When her family home on University Avenue was about to be taken down, in respect for her immense international stature, Mary Pickford was offered a few bricks in memoriam. Those few bricks are long gone, but not the bricks of the bungalow Mary Pickford raffled off in support of the war effort.



Mary Pickford War Funds bungalow opening May 26, 1943  
[www.museevirtual-virtualmuseum.ca](http://www.museevirtual-virtualmuseum.ca)

The permanent proof that the roots of America's Sweetheart were in Canada remain on view at 90 Glenwood Crescent in Toronto. They are testimony that Mary Pickford could ACT when needed—not just act.

## Reading

### Canada's Answer to Nazi Oppression



*With astounding accuracy Johnny hurls the bayonet and pins Hitler's sleeve to the desk ... but a fraction of an inch from the alarm buttons. "Another move like that Hitler and it may turn out to be your last." From "Johnny Canuck in Berlin", Leo Bachle, Dime Comics No. 2, pp. 26–29, March 1942*

Leo Bachle was a student at Danforth Technical Institute in Toronto when a manager of Bell Features recruited him to create a super-hero. Leo's Johnny Canuck, a Canadian Air Force Captain, made a debut in the first issue of Dime Comics which came out in February 1942\* when Leo was 16 years old.

"I drew Johnny Canuck and he had my face, and everybody at my school (Danforth Tech) read it, and I was popular. I drew the teachers, and all the kids read the books to see whose name I was going to mention. ("The Last Word: Farewell Johnny Canuck" Mike Aragona, Savage Enterprises Publishing, May 2003)

For the next three years Johnny Canuck was Canada's answer to Nazi oppression. Although Canuck had no super powers as a Captain and secret agent he met Hitler face to face. He punched Hitler a few times, pinned his

hand to a desk, shot at him and almost single-handedly managed to eliminate the evil Nazi leader.

Canuck's antics were wish-fulfillment for youth served with a side dish of propaganda. Movies were the grown ups' equivalent. Canadian-born actors in Hollywood from Faye Wray (*King Kong* 1933) to Walter Pidgeon (*Mrs. Miniver*, 1942), to Raymond Massey (*Abe Lincoln in Illinois*, 1938—for which he was nominated for an Academy Award) and Hume Cronyn (*Hitchcock's Shadow of a Doubt*, 1943) found themselves in films with titles such as *Navy Secrets*, *Action in the North Atlantic*, *God is my Co-Pilot* and *Smashing the Spy Ring*.

These types of war movies reinforced government propaganda in both the U.S.A. and in Canada that evil German and Japanese spies and saboteurs lurked everywhere and that any person with an Axis heritage was evil. The propaganda helped recruitment and sold Victory Bonds.



*The Seventh Cross, starring Spencer Tracy, Jessica Tandy and Hume Cronyn*

Austrian-born director Fred Zimmermann, who went on to make film classics such as *High Noon* and *From Here to Eternity* had his first hit with the war movie *The Seventh Cross* (1944). Hume Cronyn received his only Academy Award nomination for playing the representative of the few good people still left in Germany in spite of the evil Nazis who hunted Spencer Tracy and six other escapees from a concentration camp where they had been interned as political prisoners.

*The Seventh Cross* was a daring break with the heavily propagandistic anti-German fare that was part of the Hollywood movie machine; it played well as a follow-up to *Casablanca*, 1942. These two movies demonstrated that in tough times good people in any country come through.



Lorne Greene  
[www.canadianencyclopedia.ca](http://www.canadianencyclopedia.ca)

The same was true of Hollywood movie stars. They came through. Canadian-born actors Glenn Ford, Lorne Greene and James Doohan donned uniforms. Others served the war effort by lending their talents to causes. Comedian Jack Benny came to Canada to entertain the rank and file of naval personnel. He

toured bases in Montreal, Ottawa, Borden and Toronto. Sixteen-year old Shirley Temple came to Ottawa to promote the Victory Loan Campaign. Toronto-born Mary Pickford, known as “America’s Sweetheart”, twice visited Defence Industries Ltd. in Ajax to raise funds; one of her causes was British bombing victims.

While Tinsel Town dished out a full range of escapism, propaganda and message films and its stars lent their talents and glamour to war causes, a new form of Canadian media was developing that cut through the propaganda. Fifty-nine members of The Canadian Army Film and Photo Unit (CFPU) served in combat operations in Europe between 1941 and 1945; 18 were wounded, 6 killed.



Ken Bell  
Canadian Photographer

The Department of National Defence tasked the CFPU’s enlisted men and women with supplying them and media outlets with front line action. They did not disappoint. CFPU photos of the landings in Normandy were the first to flash onto the front pages of world media. Lieutenant Ken Bell’s gripping footage of the D-Day landing at Juno Beach was the only colour record to survive.

Because the CFPU went daringly into combat locations, sometimes ahead of troops, or even over them by parachute jump, the Canadian public saw reality unlike anything that Hollywood had ever delivered.

Far removed from the battlefields and the dangerous oceans, Canadians on the home front had many different ways to see and assess the war—from the most exaggerated and cartoonish, to the propagandistic, to news style footage. Each served its own purpose.

Young Canadians today face the same range of presentations of war and violence as during WWII, maybe even more with the addition of video/media games. The purposes of the renditions of war and violence today seem less clear cut. Hitler provided 16 year old Leo Bachle with an easy target for evil. Who are the targets of violence today?

## After the Reading

- Explain whether or not you think Leo Bachle was an ordinary teenager. Be prepared to defend your position.
- Why did Hollywood produce a great many war movies even before the USA entered the war?
- How would Canada's Department of National Defence benefit by having a Film and Photo Unit?
- How do the WWII purposes for the presentation of war differ from the purposes of presenting war today?
- Debate: News is propaganda

## Extensions

- Hollywood movies during WWII predominantly supported the war effort. View one of the following to analyze what stance Hollywood takes in *The Hurt Locker*, *Charlie Wilson's War*, *Lions for Lambs* and *Three Kings*.
- Investigate the Canadian comic book heroes of 1940–1945. If there were a ban on American comics today, what heroes would you create for Canadians?
- List all the reasons stars support causes. Do any of these reasons overlap with what stars did during WWII?

## Sources

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## Audio Visual Clips

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- NFB "Train Busters"  
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\*In 1940 there was a ban on American comics in Canada that did not lift until after the war. In the void left by Superman and other Marvel heroes, Canadian comic book heroes were born.