

Clint Eastwood: *Gran Torino* – Analysing a film

by Linda Weiland



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Der Film *Gran Torino* entstand im Jahr 2008 unter der Regie von Clint Eastwood. Eastwood spielt darin auch die Hauptfigur Walt Kowalski, einen patriotischen, rassistischen und stolzen Kriegsveteranen und ehemaligen *Ford*-Arbeiter, der mit den aktuellen Entwicklungen in der amerikanischen Gesellschaft hadert. Der Glanz Amerikas, den Walt in seinem geliebten 1972er *Gran Torino* repräsentiert sieht, ist im Verfall; seine Söhne bevorzugen japanische SUVs und seine Nachbarschaft wird zunehmend von der *Asian Hmong community* und kriminellen Gruppen übernommen. Als Walt beginnt, sich, seinen Besitz und seine Werte gegen die kriminellen Machenschaften zu verteidigen, lernt er die benachbarte Hmong Familie und deren Kultur kennen und schätzen und muss seine Vorurteile überwinden. Aufgrund der allgegenwärtigen Themen *racism*, *prejudices* und *American society* sowie Walts Charakterentwicklung eignet sich der Film für vielschichtige Analysen im Englischunterricht und regt zu Diskussionen an.

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Competences and skills:

The skills trained consistently throughout this unit are **viewing**, when students watch the film in segments, **reading**, when they research contextual information and **speaking**, when they share their results. As the film segments are accompanied by while-viewing questions, **note-taking** is also trained. While researching certain aspects of the context independently, students also train their **research skills**. **Film analysis** as a complex skill is practised when students “close-watch” and analyse short segments of the film.

Overview:

List of abbreviations:

A Analysis	C Comment	CH Characterisation
CT Creative task	D Discussion/debate	F Working with a film
G Group work	LVC Listening/viewing comprehension	
M Mind map/visualising	P Working with a picture/cartoon	
PR Presentation	R Research	S Summary
T Working with a text	VI Working with a video	W Writing

Topic	Material	Methods/Skills
1: Before the film	M1	CH, G, P, PR, R, T
2: The opening scene	M2	CH, F, LVC, S
3: Viewing segment I	M3–M6	A, CH, F, LVC, M, P, PR, R, T
4: Viewing segment II	M7–M8	A, CH, D, F, LVC, M, PR, R, T
5: Viewing segment III	M9–M10	A, CH, CT, D, F, LVC, M, P, R, T
6: Viewing segment IV	M11	A, C, F, LVC, P
7: The ending	M12	A, C, D, F, LVC, P, R, T
8: After the film	M13	A, C, D, P, T, VI, W

Topic 1: Before the film

Worksheet – Before the film

M1

Clint Eastwood has often been referred to as “icon”, “legend” and “the man” of American cinema. He directed, produced and starred in *Gran Torino* – and he also wrote the soundtrack. Let’s find out more about the man behind the film.

Group work

1. Work in a group of four students. Distribute the subtopics 1–4 among the group members.
2. Do the tasks added to each subtopic and work with the sources provided. Decide on 5–8 aspects of your topic that you would like to share with the group members.
3. Meet in your group, share your findings, take notes and compile a portrait of Clint Eastwood. Search for an image of Clint Eastwood, print it out and add it to your portrait.
4. Look at the film poster of *Gran Torino*:
<https://raabe.click/en-grantorino-poster> [last access: 02/08/2022]. Describe it. What is your first impression of Eastwood’s character? What do you expect the film to be about?



Subtopic 1: Clint Eastwood’s biography

<https://raabe.click/en-eastwood-minibio> [last access: 02/08/2022]



<https://raabe.click/en-eastwood-britannica-bio> [last access: 02/08/2022]



1. Find out why Clint Eastwood is considered a legend in American cinema. Note down some of his achievements.
2. A.O. Scott, a *New York Times* film critic interviewed in the video, describes how the “icon” Eastwood evolved in his first Western films and how it became his signature for the rest of his career. Describe and explain the features of this “icon”.



M4 Film script – Tao



The house is a buzz of activity. The older Hmong speak their native language, the younger generation speaks both English and Hmong. [...] Tao's Grandmother (PHONG) complains to a MAN.

PHONG (SUBTITLED) There's no man in this house, that's why my daughter
5 should remarry. Being a second wife is better than having a woman be the head of the household. It's not our way.

MAN (SUBTITLED) What about Tao?

PHONG (SUBTITLED) What about him?

MAN (SUBTITLED) He's the man in the house.

10 **PHONG (SUBTITLED)** Tao's not a man. Look at him in the kitchen, washing dishes like a woman. Even his sister gives him orders and he obeys.

The CAMERA PANS TO the kitchen where TAO washes a pile of dishes. An older relative drops dishes in the sink, without acknowledging Tao's presence. It's clearly an insult.

Taken from: <https://imsdb.com/scripts/Gran-Torino.html> [last access: 03/08/2022]

M5 Walt's house



Foto: Tom Stern/Village Roadshow Pictures/Media Magik Entertainment/Malpasos Productions

M10 Worksheet – Viewing segment III



Watch *Gran Torino* from 29:43 to 53:47.

The plot



1. What does Walt learn about his neighbours in this scene? Collect.
2. Analyse how and why Walt's relationships with his family and his Hmong neighbours develop in this segment. How are his relationships at the end of this scene different from the relationships at the end of viewing segment I (see M6, task 3)?

Walt and Sue



3. Rewatch 34:47 to 36:50 and read the film script (M9). Characterise Walt's behaviour.
4. Analyse Sue's reaction to his behaviour. What is her strategy? How does she "break the ice" between the two of them?



5. "Hmong girls fit in better", Sue says. To what extent does she represent her own statement in this scene? Discuss.

Film analysis



6. Work with a partner. Rewatch 43:40–46:42. Use the "3Cs and 3Ss" scheme (M3) and analyse the scene. Share your results.
7. Compare this scene with Walt's meetings with Father Janovich.
8. What does Walt learn in this scene? What is going on in Walt's mind? Together, find a caption for the still from the film on the next page.
9. Compare your results with Walt's thoughts according to the excerpt from the film script in the box on the next page and comment. Take into account that the section is titled "epiphany" in the film script.
10. When Walt meets Sue's friends, his reply to the question, "What do you do?" is "I fix things". To what extent has the film illustrated this side of him so far?

Topic 8: After the film

M13 Worksheet – After the film



1. Look at the film poster again. Which aspects of *Gran Torino* does it represent? To what extent were your expectations about the film right? Compare with your results from M1, task 4.
2. To what extent can *Gran Torino* be considered a typical Clint Eastwood film? Use your results from M1 and reflect.
3. The title of the film is *Gran Torino*. Explain and interpret Eastwood's choice to name it after the car.
4. What is the message of the film concerning racism in U.S. society? Interpret and comment.
5. Not every critic thinks that *Gran Torino* is a hopeful film. What do you think? Is it a masterpiece conveying hope or a film that represents more problems than solutions? Collect ideas.

Gran Torino: Reviews, comments, secondary sources



6. Visit the website below and watch the video. Collect: what is the "white saviour trope"? Then discuss: to what extent does it apply to *Gran Torino*? And which message does it convey? <https://raabe.click/en-white-saviour> [last access: 03/08/2022]
7. Read the two following reviews. Collect: what do the critics praise the film for? What do they criticise about it? Then comment: which aspects do you agree or disagree with?
<https://raabe.click/en-GranTorino-review1>
<https://raabe.click/en-GranTorino-review2>
 [last accesses: 03/08/2022]
8. Read through the comments about *Gran Torino* on *Rotten Tomatoes*. Choose three comments and elaborate what the critics might refer to. Which comments do you agree or disagree with?
<https://raabe.click/en-GranTorino-RottenTomatoes> [last access: 03/08/2022]
9. Fresh or Rotten? Use you results from tasks 5–8 and write your own film review. Use the link below as a guideline. Then post it on *Rotten Tomatoes*.
<https://raabe.click/en-writing-a-review> [last access: 03/08/2022]

