

MARY PICKFORD: PBS American Experience  
Viewing Directions/Notes  
(38:51 combined viewing time)

*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Plain Gladys Smith."*

## **1. Plain Gladys Smith**

**Direct students to pay close attention to Mary Pickford's early life.**

**Watch this portion together (viewing time 7:53).**

**At 11:53, STOP** the video after you learn of the change in her name... After the voiceover says...

Voiceover : **Gladys Smith emerged from the meeting a triumphant "Mary Pickford."**  
*(See transcript.)*

### **DISCUSSION:**

**Ask** students for their reaction to her early life.

**Stress** that she really didn't have a childhood where she could play and have fun...

...She had to earn money for her family.

...At their age, she was often separated from her family while on the road.

**Ask** students why they feel she had the recurring nightmare of no audience?

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*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Stage to Screen."*

## **2. Stage to Screen**

**Direct students to pay close attention to early film acting.**

**Watch this portion together (viewing time 6:01).**

**At 17:54, STOP** the video after film historian Tino Balio says...

Tino Balio: **...and she conveys more emotion in the process.**  
*(See transcript.)*

### **DISCUSSION:**

**Ask** students how much it cost to see early movies? *(a nickel)*

**Ask** if they know what these early movie theaters were called? *(Nickelodeons)*

**Ask** what was meant by "She invented acting for film." *(natural facial expressions as opposed to the earlier exaggerated theater techniques)*

**Discuss** how her constantly changing, subtle facial expressions draw the viewer in to closely watch her face.

**Tell** students that in her first year at Biograph Films working for D.W. Griffith she made more than 60 films. **Discuss** how this compares to today's major stars.

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*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Rise to Stardom."*

### **3. Rise to Stardom**

**Direct** students to pay close attention to the early techniques of making movies. **Watch** this portion together (viewing time 4:47).

**At 26:44, STOP** the video after film historian Jeanine Basinger says...

Jeanine Basinger: ...so she made a direct connection with her audience by playing a role they could understand and identify with.

*(See transcript.)*

#### **DISCUSSION:**

**Tell** students that this 80 minute picture, *Tess of The Storm Country*, shot her to stardom in a way never known before. Everyone loved her. Zukor built her star image by hiring glamour photographers and making sure she was chaperoned everywhere by her mother rather than being seen with Owen Moore.

**Ask** students if Mary's romance with Owen Moore reminds them of today's star romances?

**Discuss** student impressions of the early movie business and some of the techniques shown.

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*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Mary's New Love."*

### **4. Mary's New Love**

**Direct** students to pay close attention to Mary Pickford's rise to super stardom.

**Alert** students that the next portion opens with 1915 footage of New York City, including Times Square and Broadway.

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**Watch** this portion together (viewing time 4:12).

**At 35:10, STOP** the video when the voiceover says about stardom...

Voiceover : **No one yet knew what it was, including her.**

*(See transcript.)*

## DISCUSSION:

Ask why Mary Pickford was called "America's Sweetheart."

Ask who students feel is "American's Sweetheart" today?

Ask students to recall how many people watched Mary Pickford on a movie screen every day? (12 million)

Discuss media of that time... no television, no computers, no iPods, no radio...Movies were the only media entertainment. In many theaters, the movies changed daily and some people went to movies every day.

Discuss Mary Pickford's business skills and her sense of responsibility...Does this remind them of any modern day stars?

Tell students that Mary Pickford's marriage to Owen Moore fell apart, largely due to his drinking and abusive behaviors. She worked with and fell in love with the leading male movie star at that time... Douglas Fairbanks, shown in the next segment.

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*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Mary's New Love."*

## 5. Many Roles

Direct students to pay close attention to how celebrity was used to promote other causes.

Watch this portion together (viewing time 5:00).

At 45:55, STOP the video when the voiceover says...

Voiceover: Zukor conceded that her performance was the most remarkable of her career.

*(See transcript.)*

## DISCUSSION:

Ask students for their reaction to Mary Pickford's sneaking *Stella Maris* into production when Zukor was out of town. What does this tell us about Mary Pickford?

Discuss Mary Pickford's roles as a little girl and reasons that might explain why *The Poor Little Rich Girl* made the most money of any of her films up to that time. Compare this to a popular book today, such as the *Harry Potter* series, and discuss why so many people go to see film adaptations.

Discuss the use of intertitles in silent films... "Now you've spoiled the best fight I ever had."

Discuss celebrities raising money for political and social causes. Do they see evidence of this today?

*On the DVD menu...*

*Choose "Scene selections" and then choose "Hollywood Royalty."*

## **6. Hollywood Royalty**

**Direct students to pay close attention to the reasons why United Artists was formed. Watch this portion together (viewing time 10:58).**

**At 56:54, STOP** the video when the film historian Kevin Brownlow says,...

Kevin Brownlow: **"I still don't know how they did it."**

*(See transcript.)*

### **DISCUSSION:**

**Ask** students why United Artists was formed? *(Zukor was planning to be in total control of the movie industry. Mary Pickford, Douglass Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, and D.W. Griffith wanted to be independent to make their own decisions.)*

**Ask** students for their reaction to Mary Pickford's and Adolph Zukor's separation of their business and personal relationships.

**Tell** students that United Artists still successfully distributes movies today.

**Discuss** why Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks were seen as "Hollywood Royalty."

**Discuss** if any couples today might be considered "Hollywood Royalty."

**Discuss** the amazing special effects in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and the fact that this was done without use of digital cameras or computers.