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TOEFL TEST 1
Internet-based test

Reading
Listening
Speaking
Writing

Table of contents

Reading Set 1

Film Noir

The term *film noir* refers to a style of Hollywood movie-making that was prevalent from the early 1940s until about 1960. ♦ *Noir* means, literally, "black," and was invented by French movie critics to describe the tone, mood, or point-of-view of a string of notable Hollywood films – the majority of which featured crime or mystery themes – that were released in **their** country in the aftermath of World War II. □Unlike traditional Hollywood movies, *noir* films were pessimistic, bleak, and highlighted, in the words of one French critic, selected "disagreeable realities" of modern living. **Δ** A classic film noir story featured a **cynical**, depressed, hard-hearted male and a beautiful but dangerous *femme fatale*, a female character who would sexually seduce him, and then betray or double cross him in some way.○

Though it's difficult to classify noir films with exact precision, critics generally agree that they shared four distinct characteristics. First, *noir* films were subjective, presenting reality from the point-of-view of the movies' protagonist. In sharp contrast to conventional Hollywood movies, *noir* protagonists were rarely handsome, virtuous, intelligent, moral role models. Instead, they were detectives, crooks, psychopaths, loners, war veterans, murderers, or simply average Joes trying to make ends meet. A second characteristic of *noir* movies is that their protagonists frequently violated convention by shifting roles during the film: A detective might become a suspect, or a victim could become an attacker. The storylines in *noir* movies were usually complex, filled with plot twists and revealed in nonlinear fashion, often via a series of flashbacks. Common plots involved a protagonist suffering from **amnesia**, and the ordinary man who invoked calamity from some small misstep – a minor car accident, a white lie -- or from being falsely accused of a crime. Third, *film noir* protagonists had a fractured or adversarial relationship with society at large, suffering from unfair treatment or a loss of community. This tended to leave them feeling helpless, isolated, disillusioned and cynical, and lent directors a chance to explore the dichotomy of moral choice versus fate. The fourth characteristic of *film noir* movies is that they functioned as critiques of the US social and political systems. The complexities of *noir* films prohibited simple solutions, and, like real life, their endings were not the "happy ever after" closure of fairy tales and fantasy movies. *Noir* often left viewers feeling disheartened, downcast, cynical, or bitter, a radical departure from traditional Hollywood fare that ended on triumphant, upbeat notes.

To emphasize this "dark" view of American life, *noir* movies employed a technique called expressionism, using visual elements to help create mood and tone. These films were typically shot in black-and-white, with dim lighting and non-traditional camera angles, and set in urban areas. The cinematography included long, distinct shadows, inky blackness, choppy edits, dramatic music, and prominent juxtaposition of ordinary objects. Interior shots were generally of claustrophobic, dimly-lit, cheap apartments, big-city hotels rooms or abandoned warehouses. Exterior scenes were usually murky dark, often featuring rain, narrow alleys and flashing neon lights. Expressionism reinforced the state of mind of characters, and helped directors emphasize the shadowy, hidden aspects of human experience. Expressionism was first used in Germany during the 1920s, and spread to America by German filmmakers seeking refuge during the Second World War.

Film noir developed concurrently with a movement in literary noir, which reflected the uncertainties of a nation suddenly confronted with the atrocities of war and the complex relationships of a changing world order. Helplessness, confusion, paranoia and alienation were frequent *noir* themes. One of the most influential noir novelists of the 1940s was

Cornell Woolrich, who had 11 movies based on his writing. Woolrich's protagonists included alcoholics, criminals, and ordinary people caught in surreal predicaments, such as a man who was hypnotized into believing he had committed a murder. One of the earliest movies to earn the *noir* label was the 1941 detective thriller *The Maltese Falcon*, directed by John Huston. This film introduced an element that came to be considered characteristic of early *noir* films – a tough, pragmatic, dogged detective. As noir developed through the 1940s and 50s, however, other characteristic roles evolved, including the aging gangster, the man (or woman) wrongly accused of a crime, and the person battling some form or mental or emotional illness.

Questions

1. Look at the four symbols [♦, □, Δ , ○] that indicate where the following sentence can be added to the passage.

It typically references a specific historical period of movie making, similar to the French New Wave period, rather than the conscious creation of a new style of film.

Where would this sentence best fit?

2. The word **their** in the passage refers to
(A) films
(B) themes
(C) critics
(D) tones

3. What can be inferred from the passage about Hollywood movies in France?
(A) They usually appeared in France before they opened in America.
(B) They were more popular in France than they were in the US.
(C) They could not be viewed in France during World War II.
(D) They were specially re-made to better appeal to French audiences.

4. The word **cynical** in the passage is closest in meaning to
(A) distrustful
(B) unloyal
(C) distasteful
(D) ungrateful

5. When the author states that noir films present the point-of-view of the movies' protagonist, he means the point-of-view of the
(A) hero
(B) supporting actor
(C) main character
(D) script writer

6. Which of the following best expresses the essential information in the highlighted sentence? Incorrect choices change the meaning in important ways or leave out essential information.

(A) Second, film *noir* protagonists often changed roles in the middle of the movie, with the hero and villain, for example, suddenly trading situations and costumes.
(B) Secondly, the protagonists in *noir* movies frequently did not remain static, as was customary, instead changing their viewpoint, status, or relationship to other characters.

(C) A second characteristic of *noir* films is that they were unconventional, in that the protagonists often played several parts in the same movie: detective, suspect, victim, attacker.
(D) The second characteristic of *noir* movies is that the protagonist was difficult to identify, because he or she was typically switching roles with other members of the cast.

7. The word **amnesia** in the passage is closest in meaning to
(A) color blindness
(B) high fever
(C) cancer
(D) loss of memory

8. All of the following are mentioned as characteristics of *noir* films EXCEPT
(A) They functioned as socio-political critiques.
(B) They tried to present objective reality.
(C) Their protagonists often shifted roles.
(D) They presented protagonists versus society.

9. According to the passage, why did *noir* protagonists often feel helpless or cynical?
(A) They had had a negative experience with society.
(B) They frequently suffered from abusive childhoods.
(C) They were usually physically weak or sick..
(D) They were often criminals who loved doing wrong.

10. According to the passage, expressionism
(A) was first used in Germany during the Second World War.
(B) was virtually nonexistent in non-*noir* movies.
(C) utilized unusual camerawork to cover weak plots.
(D) used visual elements to create a dark mood and tone.

11. Why does the author mention Cornell Woolrich in the passage?
(A) to show the contrast between novels and movies
(B) to prove that *noir* novels were better than *noir* films
(C) to illustrate the link between literary and *film noir*
(D) to argue that *noir* films preceded noir literature

12. According to the passage, which of the following is true about *The Maltese Falcon*?
(A) It was directed by John Hudson.
(B) It was one of the earliest *noir* films.
(C) It was filmed in 1944.
(D) It was a defective thriller.

LISTENING SECTION

Lecture

Listen to part of a lecture from a social science class. *(Listening 1)*

1. What is the main topic of the lecture?
(A) Joseph Needham's life
(B) Chinese inventions
(C) The Needham Question
(D) The development of modern science

2. Which of the following does the professor mention as a theory for why modern science did not develop in China?
(A) Totalitarian government
(B) Lack of modern equipment
(C) China's civil wars
(D) A strong Chinese mercantile class

3. Why does the professor mention a newspaper photograph?
(A) To prove that the Chinese invented gunpowder
(B) To illustrate a claim made by Needham's critics
(C) To remind students of a homework assignment
(D) To refute an assertion by an Hungarian scholar

4. Listen again to part of the lecture. *(Listening 2)* Then answer the question.

What does the professor mean when he says this:

is quote unfavorable to the spirit of free inquiry unquote.

(A) He is repeating the exact words of the author.
(B) He does not believe what the author has written.
(C) He is paraphrasing the conclusions of Joseph Needham.
(D) He wants to highlight a controversial claim.

5. What does the professor imply about Joseph Needham?
(A) He had never visited China.
(B) His research was hindered by bias.
(C) He was an American citizen.
(D) Some of his information was inaccurate.

6. According to the professor, why is the "Needham Question" relevant today?
(A) It aids in the research of new technologies.
(B) It accurately explains Chinese culture.
(C) It forces re-examination of scientific development.
(D) It reminds us that history is usually irrelevant.

Conversation

Listen to a conversation between a student and a school administrator. *(Listening 3)*

7. How does the administrator explain the concept of declining balance points?
    A) He draws a picture.
    B) He tells a story about herself.
    C) He compares them to buying stocks.
    D) He compares them to using an ATM card.

8. Which of the following statements is correct?
    A) Students must show their ID cards at each meal.
    B) Students must buy at least 15 meals per week.
    C) Unused meals carry over to the next week.
    D) Students can eat two meals during each meal period.

9. Why does the student mention his old school?
   A) He wants to go back to it.
   B) It had a different system.
   C) He misses his English teacher.
   D) It was bigger than his new school.

10. What is NOT mentioned about meal plans?
   A) There are different ones.
   B) It's important to choose carefully.
   C) How much they cost.
   D) The number of meals in each plan.

11. Listen again to part of the conversation and answer the question. *(Listening 4)* What does the administrator mean when he says this:
No, meals do not carry over into the next week.

   A) Chefs will not cook extra meals for students.
   B) Dining halls will not serve leftovers.
   C) Students will lose declining balance points.
   D) Students cannot get credit for meals they don't eat.