



# American Center Newsletter

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American Center

Colombo

August 2009

## American Center In Action

### Lecture on Bridging Gaps in Education Delivery



Prof. Lal Perera, Director General, National Institute of Education delivers his speech.

U.S. Embassy Colombo and Room to Read had the 6<sup>th</sup> lecture on "Bridging Gaps in Education Delivery in the United States and Sri Lanka" on July 8, 2009. The topic of discussion was Assessing School Performances.

Mr. Carlos Martinez, Director Office of Standards and

Assessments for Elementary and Secondary Education, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington DC and Prof. Lal Perera, Director General, National Institute of Education presented their views linked via Digital Video Conference. The DVC was also linked to Maldives for the first time to enable the educators and officials from the Government of Maldives to interact in this session. The event was attended by educators, policy makers and members of the general public in Sri Lanka.

The series, which focuses on education policy, aims to build connections between Maldivian, U.S. and Sri Lankan educators, educational institutions, and policy makers through digital video conferences.

### American Center Celebrates 40th Anniversary of Moon Landing



Audience at the American Center Colombo

On July 20, 2009, the American Center held a special double screening of the documentary "50 Years of Exploration – The Golden Anniversary of NASA" to commemorate the Apollo 11 moon landing's 40th Anniversary and the 50th Anniversary of NASA. The first screening took place at the American Center auditorium in Colombo and was attended by a large audience that included many local students, as well as other interested visitors. The second screening took place at the Arthur C. Clarke Center for Modern Technologies (ACCIMT) in Moratuwa, as part of a larger panel discussion about the moon landing's present-day significance.



Audience at the ACCIMT in Moratuwa

The American Center  
Office of Public Diplomacy  
US Embassy  
44 Galle Road  
Colombo 3  
Sri Lanka

Telephone: 2498100

Telefax: 2498101

Email: [amcentersl@state.gov](mailto:amcentersl@state.gov)

Web: [srilanka.usembassy.gov](http://srilanka.usembassy.gov)

### Upcoming Events . . . . .

#### August 15:

Screening of documentary film "50 years of Exploration- The Golden Anniversary of NASA" at 2:30 pm at the Public Library, Colombo 7.

#### August 13-22:

Workshop on short films and drama's with a US expert Constance Tillotson and Sri Lankan film maker Anoma Rajakaruna at the Sarvodaya Educational and Information Center, Bandaragama.

The short films produced at this workshop, will be screened at the Punchi Theatre Borella on the 22 at 7 p.m.

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## U.S. Embassy Assists Training of Blind Teachers in Braille Music Notation



Participants with Professor Weerakkody and resource persons from the Special Needs Resource Center

The U.S. Embassy provided a grant of Rs. 131,500 to the Special Needs Resource Centre of the University

of Peradeniya to conduct a residential training course on Braille music for 12 blind teachers, from July 13 – 18.

The special residential training course held on Braille music notation as applied to western music was for the benefit of teachers from mostly rural schools including the Uva province, Ampara district, Puttalam district, Southern province, and Central province. This training program was organized by the Special Needs Resource Center as a tribute to Louis Braille, the inventor of the Braille system on his 200<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary.

The objective of this course was to train and educate a group of vision-impaired Sri Lankan music teachers to use Braille music notations in western music so that this invention of Louis Braille may be preserved and imparted to future generations.

The course was organized and conducted by Professor Weerakkody of University of Peradeniya. Course material printed in Braille and Braille books on music were provided to each participant. In addition the Special Needs Resource Center of the University of Peradeniya produced a booklet consisting of the symbols used in printed music as embossed diagrams which gave each participant some knowledge of printed sheet music for teaching sighted students. At the end of the course, each participant was presented with two compact disks containing classical and popular music by several eminent musicians.

This was a great opportunity for the teachers to broaden their knowledge of the Braille notation system and impart the knowledge gained to their vision impaired and sighted students.

## A Public Lecture on Swine Flu at the American Center



Dr.(Ms.) Geethani Wickremasinghe is doing her presentation on Swine Flu

On July 9, 2009, the American Center hosted a public lecture and discussion on the Pandemic Influenza 2009 (Swine Flu) with Dr. Geethani

Wickramasinghe, Consultant Virologist, Head of Department of Virology at Medical Research Institute in Sri Lanka in order to create awareness among general public of this newly recognized viral disease. Ms. Rena Brescia, Foreign Service Medical Practitioner of the U. S. Embassy Colombo, gave the introductory remarks.

The presentation was linked to Kandy and Male' American Corners through Digital Video

Conference facility. After the very informative presentation by Dr. Wickremasinghe, both Kandy and Maldives participants had a lively discussion joining the Colombo audience. The Male'



Participants from the Health Sector in Maldives

participants were very encouraged by the promotion of the awareness of 'H1N1 Virus' and thanked the American Center and the American Corner for

arranging such an informative, important and interesting program. One of the participants commented that she looked forward to more such awareness programs by the AC Male'. A participant in Kandy commented that this awareness program is a necessity and is of educational value for the community.

*Continued on page 6*

## United States Government donates additional funds to WFP's Sri Lanka operations



U.S. Chargé d'affaires James R. Moore presents \$14.3 million of food aid from USAID to Hon. Basil Rajapaksa, Special Advisor to the President and Member of Parliament.

July 14, 2009: A donation from the U.S. Agency for International Development, consisting of US\$14 million (Rs. 1, 600 million) worth of food supplies, has been warmly hailed by the United Nations World Food Programme. WFP said that the much-needed food commodities will be

distributed to displaced and conflict-affected people in northern Sri Lanka who are currently accommodated in temporary welfare villages.

The U.S. Chargé d'Affaires to Sri Lanka, James R. Moore, handed over the donation, which totals some 3,750 metric tons (MT) of lentils, 1,040 MT of vegetable oil and 14,700 MT of wheat. Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, Member of Parliament and Senior Advisor to H.E. the President, Mr. W.K.K. Kumarasiri, Secretary of the Ministry of Nation Building & Estate Infrastructure Development (MNBEID), and Mr. Adnan Khan, WFP Representative, accepted the donation on behalf of the people of Sri Lanka.

WFP says the USAID donation will allow the agency to assist 300,000 people for more than eight months under its Vulnerable Group Feeding Program.

## USAID SUCCESS STORIES

### Rice Farmers Profit from Pickles in Eastern Sri Lanka.



Farmers in the eastern districts of Ampara and Moneragala have started to grow small cucumbers that are pickled in brine to become gherkins for the export market.

Traditional rice paddy farmers like P.G. Dayananda are embracing modern agricultural practices and improving their incomes by expanding to a cash crop with high demand: pickles.

USAID, in partnership with the Sri Lankan agricultural manufacturer Hayleys Group, is helping Tamil, Muslim, and Sinhalese rice farmers to increase their incomes and communities to begin working together after years of conflict.

Farmers in the eastern districts of Ampara and Moneragala have started to grow small cucumbers that are pickled in brine to become gherkins for the export market. Hayleys' market access offers tremendous opportunities for Sri Lanka's farmers to switch from subsistence to commercial farming.

The four-month project started last April with 160 farmers growing cucumbers during the idle months between the two traditional rice seasons. These farmers earned an additional \$232 on average, a substantial amount for paddy farmers in the region.

For I.K. Bandula, a farmer from Rununugama, Ampara District, the extra \$190 he earned from one cucumber harvest will be put to good use. "This is a help to me and my family as it will help me settle some of my defaulted loans," he said.

After the pilot project ended, Hayleys expanded the program to work with 400 local farmers who produced 437 metric tons of cucumbers, valued at over \$75,000. The forecast for 2009 includes 600 farmers producing 1,500 metric tons of cucumbers valued at over \$135,000, or an average of \$226.11 per farmer.

Visit: [http://www.usaid.gov/press/frontlines/fl\\_jul09/p5\\_pickles070912.html](http://www.usaid.gov/press/frontlines/fl_jul09/p5_pickles070912.html) to read the full story.

## Free Group Advising for the Month of August

### At US-SL Fulbright Commission Colombo:

#### Thursday, August 6th, 3:00-4:30 pm

How to compile a strong application targeting financial aid ( undergraduates)

#### Monday, August 10th, 3:00-4:30 pm

Essay Workshop

#### Tuesday, August 11th, 2:45-4:30 pm

Orientations for undergraduate students

#### Monday, August 17th, 3:00-4:30 pm

Orientations for undergraduate students

#### Monday, August 24th, 3:00-4:30 pm

Orientations for graduate students

### At the American Corner in Kandy:

#### Thursday, August 13th

##### 11.00 am – 1.30 pm

Individual Appointments.

##### 2.30 pm – onwards

Orientation Program as needed or Individual Appointments.

#### Friday, August 14th

##### 8.30 am – 10.30 am

Individual Appointments.

##### 10.30 am – 1.30 pm

Orientation Program as needed or Individual Appointments.

##### 2.00 pm – 3.00 pm

Special session / Writing a winning application essay / Financial aid awareness program as needed or Individual Appointments.

### At the Mahinda College OBU:

#### August 27th and 28th

**Admission free.** Please note that prior registration is necessary to attend the above.

United States - Sri Lanka Fulbright Commission  
22, Flower Terrace, Colombo 7

Phone: 094-112-564176

Fax: 094-112-564153

E-mail: [advising@isplanka.lk](mailto:advising@isplanka.lk)

## The Fulbright Commission holds a Pre-Departure Orientation.



James R. Moore, Charge d'Affaires , US Embassy Colombo addressing the US-bound students.

The US-SL Fulbright Commission held a Pre-Departure Orientation for those students who would be starting their studies in the US in the Fall

semester. The event was designed to make Sri Lankan students understand and appreciate the cultural diversity and the different educational system of the United States. It was also intended to enable students to be better prepared to cope with a significantly different socio-economic and cultural background than theirs.

It was held on July 17 at the Commission's Auditorium at 22, Flower Terrace, Colombo 07 and the Chief Guest was James R. Moore, Deputy Chief of Mission to Sri Lanka and Maldives. Mr. Glen Davis, Cultural Affairs Officer at the U.S. Embassy in Colombo also attended the event and participated as a panelist.

The Executive Director of US-SLFC, Tissa Jayatilaka, welcomed all participants. While congratulating the participants, the DCM shared his experiences with the US-bound students. Acting Consular officer, Emily Hicks explained the importance of maintaining the F1/J1 status and described the essentials they should adhere to. Tissa Jayatilaka led a lively discussion on the academic expectations of U.S. institutions. Other topics included what employers want one to learn at college and employment opportunities available back in Sri Lanka. A group of current students studying in the US held small group discussions with the freshman on studying and living in the US.

## Pop Superstar Michael Jackson Created Universal Music

### Controversial figure brought together fans from around the globe



"King of Pop" Michael Jackson, pictured here in Singapore in 1993

Michael Jackson, the larger-than-life American singer widely referred to as the "King of Pop," died unexpectedly June 25. He was in the final stages of rehearsing for a run of 50 sold-out arena concerts in London set to begin in July, with additional international touring to

follow.

As news of Jackson's death spread worldwide, a deluge of tributes emerged — not just from the singer's home country, but from diverse international sources as well. Former South Korean President Kim Dae-jung, for example, described Jackson as "a hero of the world," reported the *New York Times*, while the Nelson Mandela Foundation, created by the human rights activist and former president of South Africa, stated, "His loss will be felt by fans worldwide."

Nowhere was the global impact of the singer's death more evident than on the Internet, which exploded with Jackson-related news following the event. YouTube quickly displayed tens of thousands of homemade tribute videos; one particularly unusual segment, showing more than 1,500 inmates in a Philippines prison performing the signature dance from Jackson's groundbreaking *Thriller* music video, spread virally, receiving more than 28 million views at the time this article was written. There were news reports that Google News, a leading search engine, initially received so many "Michael Jackson" requests that its computers mistakenly believed it was under automated cyberattack.

The power of Jackson's music to unite fans from around the globe — seemingly regardless of their political, religious, ethnic, or socio-economic

differences — remains unparalleled. "My parents don't know much American music," said Rajneil Singh, a 23-year-old whose family immigrated to the United States from the Fiji Islands in the 1970s. "But they know *all* of Michael Jackson. He transcends not just cultures, but generations — the old people are just as sad as the young people. There aren't many artists who can have that sort of impact."

### The Man and the Music

Jackson crafted a trademark musical style that earned him massive success. "You could say that it was pop or that it was rhythm and blues, but it really was a unique-sounding hybrid," said Geoff Grace, a California composer who worked for Jackson as an arranger and orchestrator in conjunction with Jackson's longtime music director, Brad Buxer. "Michael would never imitate someone else's style. He was always an original." While maintaining his distinctive voice, Jackson exhibited a wide stylistic range. "There are a lot of acts known for hard-hitting dance music, or for tender ballads, but Michael was known for both," added Grace. "People might have been interested in him for something sweet like 'The Girl Is Mine,' or a harder, driving song like 'Jam.' He had a breadth, as well as uniqueness, of style that captured a lot of people's attention."

Key to Jackson's style was the sonic bedrock that Buxer, Grace and others helped create for his recordings and live performances. "A lot of the instrumental sounds used on Michael's recordings are larger than life, just like everything else about him," said Grace. Whether recording pianos, drums, synthesizers or strings, Jackson and his production team took great care to produce tones and textures that were edgy and powerful. "The goal was more than just creating a wide, lush, stereo soundscape," Grace continued. "It was, 'What can we use to make an *impact*?'"

*Continued on page 6*

## Pop Superstar Michael Jackson. . . .

From page 6

Perhaps more important than the music itself was Jackson's total fearlessness on stage. The singer's breakout television performance of the song "Billie Jean" for the *Motown 25: Yesterday, Today, and Forever* special in 1983, for example, showcased Jackson's fiery energy, explosively virtuosic dancing and total commitment to his performance. "Starting in the 1990s, there would be moments when he would just stop and scream during his concerts and videos," said Grace. "He didn't hold anything back."



In 1999, Jackson met with Nelson Mandela (left, foreground) and donated profits from two shows to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.

Jackson grew up in the spotlight as the youngest member of the Jackson 5 singing group, performing with his four older brothers and achieving stardom as a child. And though this early experience can explain much of the appeal

Jackson would later develop as a solo artist, other factors contributed as well. "Michael Jackson transcended boundaries," said Jason Burwen, a world-music radio disc jockey and graduate

student in international public policy. "Pop music is about being popular, and he appealed to people with different backgrounds. He was not just music — he was, in and of himself, a fantasy, and people were into that." Grace echoed the sentiment. "There was nobody who was even remotely like Michael," he said. "He didn't fit into anybody's stereotypes of anything. And people wanted to know what made him tick."

Indeed, Jackson's life on and off the stage was one of spectacle and controversy, inspiring both adoration and revulsion from the global public. Jackson's lavish California "Neverland Ranch," for example, housed a zoo and amusement park, while his dramatic, plastic surgery-induced appearance changes attracted morbid fascination from fans and media alike. "He was larger than life, and nobody thought he was really human," said Burwen. "So when he passed away, it was a huge shock. Nobody thought he could actually die."

*Michael Gallant, a musician, composer, producer and author living in San Francisco, serves as senior editor at Keyboard magazine.*

*The views expressed here do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.*

Source: [www.america.gov](http://www.america.gov)

## Moon landing .. From Page 1

Intern at the U. S. Embassy Colombo Andrew Weisberg was the embassy's representative at both screenings, introducing the documentary and holding a short question and answer session afterward.

He also served as the embassy's representative on the panel at the Arthur C. Clarke Center.

## A Public Lecture on Swine Flu . . .

From Page 2



Participants in Kandy viewing the slide presentation on H1N1 Virus

Printed material on 'H1N1 Virus' was distributed among the participants in Colombo and e-mailed to the participants at American Corners subsequent to the program as a follow up. Local newspapers in Maldives - Miadhu, Haveeru, Aafathis and TV Maldives covered the DVC program.

The event helped promote awareness on 'H1N1 Virus' among the Sri Lankan and Maldivian audience and made the communities aware of programs of relevance organized for their benefit.

Monthly Essay Competition



**Learn about  
America**

**ESSAY COMPETITION**



**Essay Competition for School Children on the theme of Learn About America**

The American Center has organized an essay competition for school children which is publishing in Junior Observer of the Sunday Observer.

The monthly essay topic is for children in three age categories 12-14 years, 15-16 years and 17-18 years.

Each age group is given a monthly topic related to the United States of America and is asked to write an essay with a minimum word count. The students can conduct research for their essay at the American Center Library in Colombo, at American Corners in Kandy and Oluvil, or from sources on [America.gov](http://America.gov), a very good internet resource with information on the United States, its culture, history, literature, politics, tourist attractions and much more.

The first three winners in each age group will be given a selection of American books, a lifetime membership to the American Center Library, and a certificate signed by the U.S. Ambassador. A prize giving ceremony will be held at the American Center Colombo every two months.

Essay topics for August are as follows :

**12-14 years** : The statue of Liberty- A landmark in the United States (500 words)

**15-16 years** : The most popular sport in the United States (750 words)

**17-18 years** : The role of the United States in World Peace (1000 words)

Please see the Junior Observer of the Sunday Observer for more details.

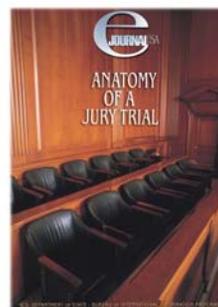
**American Center Library hosts a program for Masters students of the University of Colombo.**



Exploring online databases available

12 students from University of Colombo who are pursuing a Masters in Teacher Librarianship visited the American Center library on July 24, 2009. They were given an introduction to the American Center library, its resources and services and a tour of the facility. In addition they were shown how to search effectively using Google and how to access electronic databases such as EBSCO host. A documentary film called "Introduction to Libraries" and a CD on the Library of Congress were also screened.

**eJournalUSA**



**Anatomy of a Jury Trial**

**Electronic Journal of the US Department of State**

**July 2009**

Juries — usually groups of 6 or 12 ordinary citizens — provide a crucial service for their fellow citizens: Just as in medieval England, where they got started, juries prevent government, even democratic government, from pursuing oppressive prosecutions.

**Web access:** <http://www.america.gov/media/pdf/ejs/0709.pdf#popup>

New Additions: The American Short Story Collection



A collection of some of the finest short stories ever written covering a diverse range of topics by some of America's greatest authors, now available on DVDs at the AIRC



Richard Wright's  
**Almos' A Man**

Starring: LeVar Burton, and Madge Sinclair  
Directed by: Stan Lathan



K. A. Porter's  
**The Jilting of Granny Weatherall**

Starring: Geraldine Fitzgerald  
Directed by: Randa Haines



William Faulkner's  
**Barn Burning**

Starring: Tommy Lee Jones, and Diane Kagan  
Directed by: Peter Werner



Mark Twain's  
**The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg**

Starring: Robert Preston, and Fred Gwynne  
Directed by: Ralph Rosenblum



F. Scott Fitzgerald's  
**Bernice Bobs Her Hair**

Starring Shelley Duvall and Bud Cort  
Directed by: John Micklin Silver



Willa Cather's  
**Paul's Case**

Starring: Eric Roberts  
Directed by: Lamont Johnson



Stephen Crane's  
**The Blue Hotel**

Starring David Warner, and James Keach  
Directed by: Jan Kadar



Nathaniel Hawthorne's  
**Rappaccini's Daughter**

Starring: Kathleen Beller, and Kristopher Tabori  
Directed by: Dezso Magyar



James Thurber's  
**The Greatest Man in the World**

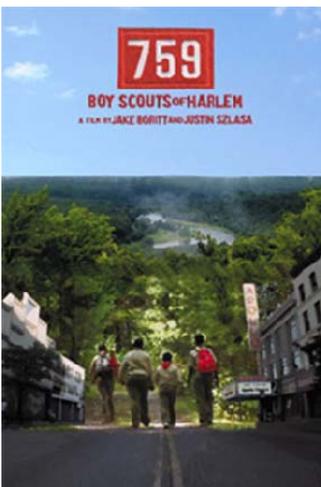
Starring: Brad Davis, and Carol Kane  
Directed by: Ralph Rosenblum



Ernest J. Gaines's  
**The Sky is Gray**

Stars: Olivia Cole and James Bond III  
Directed by: Stan Lathan

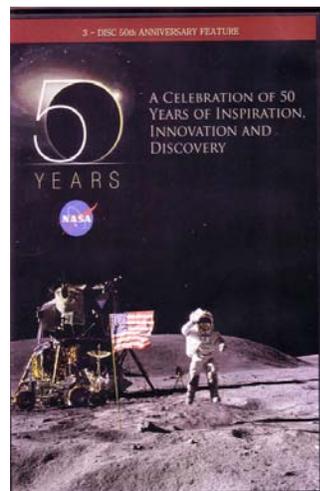
New Additions: Documentary films



**759: Boy Scouts of Harlem** is a warm, tender, funny upbeat documentary about Scouting in an unexpected place.

**Co-Directed by:**  
Jake Boritt & Justin Szlasa

**Running time:**  
72 minutes

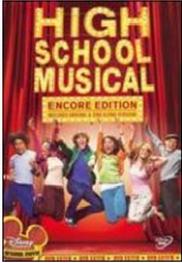


**A Celebration of 50 years of inspiration, innovation and discovery.**

This three DVD set spotlights NASA's expeditions and innovations of the past five decades through a comprehensive video presentation and an engaging, interactive online feature.

Every Thursday at 2.30pm

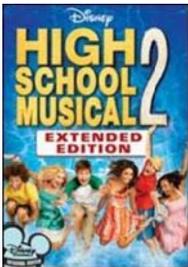
*Entrance free!*



**August 6 - High School Musical** (2006, Running time: 98 minutes)

The captain of the East High basketball team and the key member of the academic club shock the student body by teaming to audition for the upcoming school musical in a Disney Channel Original Movie that's all about being yourself and following your dreams. Troy (Zac Efron) is best known as the player who keeps the East High basketball team on the scoreboard. Of course, life isn't always about athletics, though, and as Troy slam-dunks on the boards, beautiful and brainy Gabriella (Vanessa Anne Hudgens) is raising the reputation of East High as the key member of the school's successful academic team.

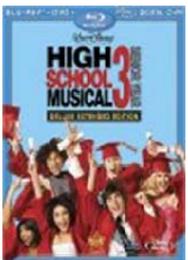
Despite their outgoing natures, no one would ever peg Troy and Gabriella as theater types. When word gets out that this popular pair has secretly chosen to reach for the stars and try their luck on the stage, the students of East High are about to learn an important lesson in teamwork while gearing up for a musical performance that will have their audience dancing in the aisles.



**August 13 - High School Musical 2** (2007, Running time: 111 minutes)

Kenny Ortega's High School Musical 2 reunites the cast from the hit made-for-Disney Channel original to tell another story in the lives of the musically inclined students attending East Side High. The sequel takes place primarily at the Lava Springs Country Club, an exclusive summer resort that hires Wildcat basketball hero Troy Bolton (Zac Efron), his genius girlfriend Gabriella Montez (Vanessa Hudgens), and their two best friends. The parents of scheming Sharpay Evans (Ashley Tisdale) own the resort and she wields her remarkable power in an attempt to win Troy away from Gabriella. Eventually Troy must decide between a bright future with a scholarship, or true love. High School Musical 2 premiered on the cable outlook on August 17, 2007.

Musical 2 premiered on the cable outlook on August 17, 2007.



**August 20 - High School Musical 3** (2008, Running time: 112 minutes)

It's almost graduation day for high school seniors Troy, Gabriella, Sharpay, Chad, Ryan and Taylor - and the thought of heading off in separate directions after leaving East High has these Wildcats thinking they need to do something they'll remember forever.

Together with the rest of the Wildcats, they stage a spring musical reflecting their hopes and fears about the future and their unforgettable experiences growing up together. But with graduation approaching and college plans in question, what will become of the dreams, romances, and friendships of East High's senior Wildcats? Find out what happens to all your favorite characters in the big screen musical sensation, *High School Musical 3: Senior Year!* It's a fabulous celebration the whole family will love.

Senior Year! It's a fabulous celebration the whole family will love.



**August 27 - Kit Kittredge: An American Girl** (2008, Running time: 101 minutes)

The Great Depression hits home for nine-year-old 'Kit Kittredge' when her dad loses his business and leaves to find work. Oscar Nominee Abigail Breslin stars as Kit, leading a splendid cast in the first-ever American Girl theatrical movie. In order to keep their home, Kit and her mother must take in boarders- paying houseguests who turn out to be full of fascinating stories. When mother's lockbox containing all their money is stolen. Kit's new hobo friend Will is the prime suspect. Kit refuses to believe that Will would steal, and her efforts to sniff out the real story get her and her friends into big trouble. The police say the robbery was an inside job, committed by someone they know. So if it wasn't Will then who did it?

Kit's new hobo friend Will is the prime suspect. Kit refuses to believe that Will would steal, and her efforts to sniff out the real story get her and her friends into big trouble. The police say the robbery was an inside job, committed by someone they know. So if it wasn't Will then who did it?

*Reviews drawn from All Movie Guide*

**For more details about after school movie screenings : Tel: 2498146 E-mail : [amcentersl@state.gov](mailto:amcentersl@state.gov)**

# Film Screenings at the American Center

American Center Newsletter  
August 2009

## August 2009 - Americana

### August 4 - **Shane** (1953, 118 minutes)

The simple story of a Wyoming range war is elevated to a near-mythical status in producer/director George Stevens' Western classic *Shane*. Alan Ladd plays the title character, a mysterious drifter who rides into a tiny homesteading community and accepts the hospitality of a farming family. Patriarch Joe Starrett is impressed by the way Shane handles himself when facing down hostile minions of land baron Emile Meyer, though he has trouble placing his complete trust in a stranger. Marion is attracted to Shane in spite of herself, and his son Joey flat-out idolizes Shane. When Meyer is unable to drive off the homesteaders by sheer brute strength, he engages the services of black-clad, wholly evil hired gun Jack Wilson. Shane knows that a showdown with Wilson is inevitable; he also knows that, unintentionally, he has become a disruptive element in the Starrett family. Won Oscar. Another 2 wins & 9 nominations.

### August 11 - **Apollo 13** (1995, 140 minutes)

NASA's worst nightmare turned into one of the space agency's most heroic moments in 1970, when the *Apollo 13* crew was forced to hobble home in a disabled capsule after an explosion seriously damaged the moon-bound spacecraft. Tom Hanks, Kevin Bacon, and Bill Paxton play (respectively) astronauts Jim Lovell, Jack Swigert, and Fred Haise in director Ron Howard's intense, painstakingly authentic docudrama. The *Apollo 13* crew and Houston-based mission controllers race against time and heavy odds to return the damaged spacecraft safely to Earth from a distance of 205,500 miles. Using state-of-the-art special effects and ingenious filmmaking techniques, Howard and his stellar cast and crew build nail-biting tension while maintaining close fidelity to the facts. The result is a fitting tribute to the *Apollo 13* mission and one of the biggest box-office hits of 1995. Won 2 Oscars. Another 17 wins & 26 nominations.

### August 18 - **Forest Gump** (1994, 141 minutes)

The Academy Award winner for Best Picture, Best Director Robert Zemeckis, and Best Actor Tom Hanks, this unlikely story of a slow-witted but good-hearted man somehow at the center of the pivotal events of the 20th century is a funny and heartwarming epic. Hanks plays the title character, a shy Southern boy in love with his childhood best friend (Robin Wright) who finds that his ability to run fast takes him places. As an All-Star football player he meets John F. Kennedy; as a soldier in Vietnam he's a war hero; and as a world champion Ping-Pong player he's hailed by Richard Nixon. Becoming a successful shrimp-boat captain, he still yearns for the love of his life. The visual effects incorporating Hanks into existing newsreel footage is both funny and impressive, but the heart of the film lies in its sweet love story and in the triumphant performance of Hanks as an unassuming soul who savors the most from his life and times. Won 6 Oscars. Another 32 wins & 38 nominations.

### August 25 - **To Kill a Mockingbird** (1962, 129 minutes)

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is quite simply one of the finest family-oriented dramas ever made. A beautiful and deeply affecting adaptation of the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Harper Lee, the film retains a timeless quality that transcends its historically dated subject matter (racism in the Depression-era South) and remains powerfully resonant in present-day America with its advocacy of tolerance, justice, integrity, and loving, responsible parenthood. It's tempting to call this an important "message" movie that should be required viewing for children and adults alike, but this riveting courtroom drama is anything but stodgy or pedantic. As Atticus Finch, the small-town Alabama lawyer and widower father of two, Gregory Peck gives one of his finest performances with his impassioned defense of a black man (Brock Peters) wrongfully accused of the rape and assault of a young white woman. While his children, Scout (Mary Badham) and Jem (Philip Alford), learn the realities of racial prejudice and irrational hatred, they also learn to overcome their fear of the unknown as personified by their mysterious, mostly unseen neighbor Boo Radley (Robert Duvall, in his brilliant, almost completely nonverbal screen debut). Won 3 Oscars. Another 11 wins & 12 nominations

Reviews drawn from MSN movies, All Movie Guide and Encarta

