



# REEL CULTURE



50 CLASSIC MOVIES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

(SO YOU CAN IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS)



This book is dedicated to John Hughes, who brought high school to life,  
and life to high school. And to Richard Donner, who showed  
the world that behind every geek is a super man.

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# REEL CULTURE

50 CLASSIC MOVIES YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT

(SO YOU CAN IMPRESS YOUR FRIENDS)

BY  
MIMI O'CONNOR



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## REEL CULTURE

Anyone ever tell you they're gonna make you an offer you can't refuse? Or that they're mad as hell and not going to take this anymore? Wouldn't it be great to know where these expressions came from (hint: movies in this book) and not be in the dark when someone starts gabbing about the twist at the ending of *Planet of the Apes*, the sociological message of *A Clockwork Orange*, or the final shoot-out in *Scarface*?

Classic film references seep into pop culture in ways that many people are not aware of. They pop up all throughout shows like *South Park*, *Seinfeld*, *The Family Guy*, and *The Simpsons*; they appear in newspaper headlines and television commercials; and talk show hosts like Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Conan O'Brien bust them out on a regular basis.

The thing is, if you don't know the movie, you're missing out on the joke. At best, you're a little lost and confused; at worst, you might feel kind of like an idiot.

Here are 50 classic American movies from the 20th century that, for whatever reason, just won't go away. This selection begins with something from the late 1930s (when cinema really started seeping into the cultural consciousness) and ends with a flick from the 90s (because later movies are not really "classic"—yet). These are not the best movies of all time or the most popular or the biggest moneymakers—although pretty much every film in this book would claim a spot on at least one of those lists. But these *are* the movies people riff on and quote, the movies that changed filmmaking and are endlessly name-dropped at parties and throughout the blogosphere.



This book includes everything from famous scenes to quotable lines to little-known trivia about actors, directors, and the making of the films. It also provides plot summaries—including (spoiler alert!) the all-important endings.

Of course, not every great classic movie made the cut. You might say, “What about *Star Wars*”? (Everyone already knows it—if you don't, go rent it. Now.) Or you might wonder why *Bringing Up Baby* is here. (It's one of the best movies of its kind, and every boy-meet-girl flick you've ever seen was influenced by it.) The bottom line is: Every movie mentioned here should be on your must-see list.

Once you come to know these films, you'll be amazed at how many jokes and references you suddenly get. It's like being part of a whole new club. Of course, you might not “want to belong to any club that would have someone like” you “for a member.” And after you've read this book, you'll know exactly who said that, in which movie, and when. ★

Mimi O'Conor





## BRINGING UP BABY

DIRECTOR: HOWARD HAWKS

SCREENWRITERS: HAGAR WILDE AND DUDLEY NICHOLS

### WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Dr. David Huxley is a paleontologist one bone away from completing a brontosaurus skeleton and one day away from getting married to his dull and humorless fiancée. He meets Susan Vance, an eccentric heiress who quickly falls in love with him—and someone David quickly decides he needs to avoid, due to the fact that she seems to bring chaos wherever she goes. Desperate to keep him from getting married, she delays and distracts him by insisting he help her deliver a tame leopard named Baby, which was sent as a gift from her brother in South America to her aunt in Connecticut. Exasperated by the ridiculousness of the situation and Susan herself, David agrees, and they set off on a drive from New York to Connecticut. Once in Connecticut, they get caught up in a series of misadventures (many orchestrated by Susan to further delay David's nuptials) that include losing Baby, losing Susan's dog (who makes off with the final dinosaur bone), and ending up in jail. Naturally, they also fall in love.

### Who's In It

**Cary Grant** as Dr. David Huxley

**Katharine Hepburn** as Susan Vance

**Charles Ruggles** as Major Horace Applegate

**Walter Catlett** as Constable Slocum

**May Robson** as Aunt Elizabeth Random

### More With Cary Grant

*The Awful Truth* (1937)

*Holiday* (1938)

*His Girl Friday* (1940)

*The Philadelphia Story* (1940)

*Notorious* (1946)

*To Catch a Thief* (1955)

*North By Northwest* (1962)







★ **The dog in the movie is named Skippy; he also played the terrier Asta in the Thin Man**



movies.

- ★ **The famous ripped dress scene is based on a similar situation that actually happened to Cary Grant when he was at the Roxy Theatre in Los Angeles one night.**

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?

-  It's screwball comedy at its finest. A kind of comedy popular in the 1930s and early '40s, screwballs feature absurd situations, slapstick humor, misunderstandings, and witty repartee between romantic rivals and interests. This movie has all of that, and it does it all well.
-  This is a prime example of a completely American invention: the romantic comedy. Films like *Bringing Up Baby* paved the way for movies such as *Annie Hall* (page 115), *Sleepless in Seattle*, *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *The Break-Up*, *Knocked Up*, and many, many more.
-  Grant and Hepburn's on-screen chemistry was hot and hilarious. The pair's quick, wise-cracking dialogue is considered some of the best in screwball films. Snappy exchanges in this tradition have been seen in the TV series *Moonlighting*, as well as in movies such as *When Harry Met Sally*, *Duplicity*, *Mr. and Mrs. Smith*, *Intolerable Cruelty*, *Leatherheads*, and *Juno*.
-  Grant's tailored suits and tuxedos and Hepburn's glamorous outfits (including a silver satin dress and fancy night robe) are perfect examples of 1930s Hollywood style.



- ★ ***Bringing Up Baby* was such a huge box office bomb that director Hawks was fired from the next film he was scheduled to direct for studio RKO. Meanwhile, Katharine Hepburn had a contract with RKO to do several more films, and since she was now considered “box office poison,” the executives gave her a terrible assignment for her next film, hoping she would buy out her contract for \$220,000 (she did!) so they wouldn't have to buy her out.**



Susan and David get friendly with Baby, the leopard.

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

**Grant's exasperated yet cool persona:** You can see this dashing tradition still carried out in Hollywood today by stars like George Clooney and Clive Owen.

**The dress scene:** In a typical slapstick moment, David steps on the back of Susan's dress and rips out the back panel; when she realizes what's happened, she allows him, upon his suggestion, to follow her out of the restaurant to protect her from being exposed.

**The bathrobe scene:** After Susan has sent David's clothes to the cleaners, he is forced to put on a puffy girly bathrobe he finds in her bathroom. When an older woman rings the bell, the woman asks why he is wearing it. At his wit's end, he says "Because I just went gay all of a sudden!" This is one of the earliest uses of the word *gay* to mean "homosexual," not "happy," in movies.

### QUOTABLES

*"There is a leopard on your roof, and it's my leopard and I have to get it and to get it I have to sing."*

Susan Vance says this to a homeowner who does, in fact, have a leopard on his roof, but doesn't know it and understandably thinks she's crazy.

*"Because I just went gay all of a sudden!"*

David says this when asked why he is wearing a ladies bathrobe.  
(See "bathrobe scene" above.)



## WHAT IT'S ABOUT

Dorothy Gale is a young girl who lives in the middle of nowhere in Kansas and longs to leave her sleepy life. She gets what she has wished for when a tornado blows through, picks up her house, and drops it in the Technicolor land of Oz. Unfortunately for Dorothy, her falling house kills the Wicked Witch of the East whose sister, the Wicked Witch of the West, is none too pleased. The good Witch of the North, Glinda, gives Dorothy the dead witch's ruby slippers to protect her and directs her to the Emerald City to seek out the Wizard of Oz, who supposedly can help her get back home.

Dorothy sets off down the yellow brick road and along the way picks up some friends who also need help from the Wizard: a scarecrow who wants a brain, a tin man who wants a heart, and a cowardly lion who wants some courage. But the Wicked Witch of the West is still angry and taunts the travelers along their journey with things like fire and sleep-inducing drugs (i.e., potent poppies). In the end, the Wizard can't help Dorothy, but Glinda can, and Dorothy does finally make it back home wondering if the whole thing was just a dream.



*The Wizard of Oz* is based on L. Frank Baum's 1900 novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

### Who's In It

**Judy Garland** as Dorothy Gale

**Ray Bolger** as the Scarecrow

**Bert Lahr** as the Cowardly Lion

**Jack Haley** as the Tin Man

**Frank Morgan** as the Wizard of Oz

**Margaret Hamilton** as the Wicked Witch of the West

**Billie Burke** as Glinda the Good Witch

### More With Judy Garland

*Broadway Melody* (1938)  
*Meet Me in St. Louis* (1944)  
*Strike Up the Band* (1940)  
*Girl Crazy* (1943)

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?



As a musical, *The Wizard of Oz* introduced some of the most loved songs in film history, including “Off to See the Wizard,” “If I Only Had a Brain,” and “Ding-Dong, the Witch Is Dead.” Additionally, the movie featured the ballad “Over the Rainbow,” which became Judy Garland’s signature song. Both “Over the Rainbow” and the entire score won Oscars.



The film skyrocketed Garland from child actor to major movie star overnight.



The art direction was groundbreaking in 1939. The director set the beginning and ends of the movie (the Kansas shots) in black and white, and the middle (Oz) in color, which was still new at the time.



The Munchkinland and Emerald City sets, as well as the costumes (bright silver Tin Man, scary green witch, iconic Dorothy in her checkered dress and ruby slippers), were extraordinarily designed and executed. The costumes, in fact, became iconic and are now Halloween favorites.



- ★ **Studio execs originally wanted to cut “Over the Rainbow” from the movie (the song is performed during the black-and-white scenes in Kansas at the beginning of the film), thinking the action in Oz should start sooner.**
- ★ **Actor Buddy Ebsen was originally cast as the Scarecrow, then was switched to the Tin Man, but he left the production when he discovered he was allergic to the Tin Man’s silver makeup.**
- ★ **While Judy Garland was not nominated for an Oscar, she did receive an Honorary Award for Outstanding Juvenile Performance for her work. Sadly, after a lifelong struggle with drug abuse, she died at age 47 from an accidental overdose. Her daughter is singer/actress Liza Minnelli.**

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

**Dorothy’s ruby slippers:** They are a symbol of the movie and one of the greatest images from cinema history—they’re even on display at the Smithsonian Museum!

**The munchkins:** The little people Dorothy meets when she lands in Oz, in their town of Munchkinland. The term is now used to refer to small things, among them, doughnut holes from Dunkin’ Donuts.

**The Wicked Witch of the West:** With her green-painted face, pointy nose, and shrill terrifying voice, she was scary then, and she still is.



Dorothy comforts the Cowardly Lion, who's a little short on courage.

## QUOTABLES

*"Toto, I have a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."*

Dorothy says this as she looks around the fantastical world of Oz for the first time.

*"I'll get you my pretty...and your little dog, too."*

The Wicked Witch of the West threatens Dorothy, who has just accidentally killed the witch's sister.

*"Lions and tigers and bears! Oh, my!"*

Dorothy is frightened as she enters the woods on the way to the Emerald City, thinking about what might be lurking in the trees.

*"There's no place like home."*

Dorothy must repeat this as she clicks the heels of her ruby slippers to get back to Kansas.



## WHAT IT'S ABOUT

It's 1861—in the days leading up to the Civil War—and Scarlett O'Hara is a spoiled, brazen Southern belle who can have any man she wants, but she has her heart set on family friend Ashley Wilkes, who has just decided to marry his cousin, Melanie. In a useless retaliation, Scarlett marries a guy she does not love, who dies while at war. Meanwhile, Rhett Butler, a wise-cracking businessman from Charlotte, starts pursuing Scarlett—but without much luck.

As the war continues, Scarlett's life on the Georgia family plantation they call Tara falls apart quickly. She soon winds up tending to dying soldiers in Atlanta, where she also winds up delivering Melanie's baby. Atlanta gets bombed, and Scarlett, with Rhett's help, takes Melanie and the baby back to Tara, where Scarlett does everything and anything to keep from losing the plantation.

Scarlett and Rhett finally get married, but things go sour and really tank when their daughter is killed in a riding accident. After Melanie dies while giving birth, Scarlett thinks Ashley might finally be hers—but she learns quickly she's been deluding herself all this time. She tries to reconcile with Rhett, but it's too late. Rhett leaves, and Scarlett is now alone, with only one thing to keep her going: Tara.



*Gone With the Wind* is based on Margaret Mitchell's 1936 novel of the same name.

### Who's In It

**Clark Gable** as Rhett Butler

**Vivien Leigh** as Scarlett O'Hara

**Leslie Howard** as Ashley Wilkes

**Olivia de Havilland** as Melanie Hamilton

**Hattie McDaniel** as Mammy

### More with Clark Gable

*Red Dust* (1932)





*Strange Interlude* (1932)

*It Happened*

*One Night* (1934)

*The Call of the Wild* (1935)

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?

-  The movie trounced at the Oscars that year, taking home 10 statues (among them: Best Picture, Best Director, Best Actress, and Best Supporting Actress), and the performances—which definitely seem over-the-top now—were a big reason why.
-  The chemistry between Clark Gable and Vivien Leigh was hot.
-  The cinematography—which includes scenes of Atlanta burning and hundreds of dead and dying soldiers—was striking at the time, and still is.
-  The movie is a saga, nearly *four* hours long, and a powerful piece of historical fiction, setting the romance against the backdrop of a historic, bloody war.

## QUOTABLES

*“I don’t know nothin’ ’bout birthin’ babies.”*

Prissy, Scarlett’s young servant, says this when it’s time for Melanie to give birth.

*“You need kissing badly. That’s what’s wrong with you. You should be kissed, and often, and by someone who knows how.”*

Rhett says this to Scarlett, at one of their many sexually charged meetings.

*“As God is my witness, I’ll never be hungry again.”*

A resilient Scarlett says this after returning from a burning Atlanta to find her plantation in ruin.

*“Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn.”*

Rhett responds to Scarlett after he has decided to leave her and she asks him, “What will I do?” (In other words: He’s over it.)

*“Tomorrow is another day.”*

Scarlett tells herself this at the end of the movie, showing a trace of optimism even after she’s lost everything.

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

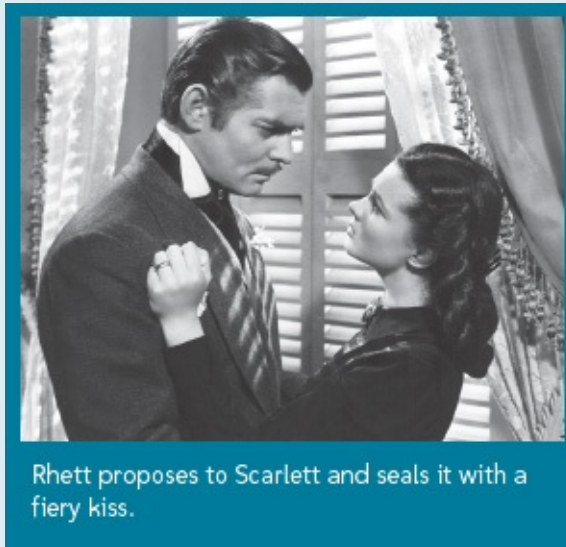
**Scarlett as an early version of a diva:** She has fierce determination and independence, even in the face of tragedy and despair.

**The shot of the dead:** In a shot created by attaching the camera to a crane to elevate it, the camera pulls back from a group of injured and dying soldiers to dramatically reveal a landscape of hundreds more like them.

**The staircase scene:** After Rhett and Scarlett have been fighting, Rhett, who is drunk, carries Scarlett up a grand staircase to the bedroom. While it seems like she’s fighting him, she wakes up the next



morning with a big smile on her face.



- ★ **An old set from *King Kong* was burned for the scenes in which Atlanta is on fire.**
- ★ **Every major Hollywood actress tried out for the role of Scarlett O'Hara, including Bette Davis, Claudette Colbert, Jean Harlow, Katharine Hepburn, and Carole Lombard.**
- ★ **Oscar-winner Hattie McDaniel was not only the first African-American to win an Academy Award, but also the first to even attend the Academy Awards.**





## WHAT IT'S ABOUT

*Citizen Kane* is about the life of big-time publisher Charles Foster Kane. It begins with a famous scene, in which Kane is about to die. He is in a giant mansion, and a snow globe tumbles from his hand as he utters the word "Rosebud." No one has a clue what that means, but reporter Jerry Thompson goes on a mission to find out.

Through visits with Kane's friends and associates, Jerry learns (illustrated through flashbacks) about Kane's childhood; his unsuccessful run for governor; his failed marriage and pathetic affair with a young, untalented opera singer; his building of a media empire; and his lonely days in old age. In the end, we learn that "Rosebud" was simply a word printed on a sled that Kane played with as a child. Yes, a sled. People have lots of theories about what that means (lost innocence? a lost childhood?) but it surely ties in to the movie's central message: Money cannot buy happiness.

### Who's In It

**Orson Welles** as Charles Foster Kane

**Dorothy Comingore** as Susan Alexander Kane

**Agnes Moorehead** as Mary Kane

**Ruth Warrick** as Emily Monroe Norton Kane

### More Directed by Orson Welles

*The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942)

*Othello* (1952)

*Touch of Evil* (1958)



- ★ **Welles' masterpiece was a flop at the box office. It was then nominated for nine Academy Awards (box office success and award nomination did not go hand in hand back then) but was awarded only one, for original screenplay. Every time the film was mentioned at the 1941 Academy Awards ceremony, it was booed.**

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?



It used innovative (at the time) filmmaking techniques like deep focus (when all images in a frame are in sharp focus), flashbacks, unconventional camera angles, and dark lighting. All of this changed how a movie could look, how a story could be told, and how the psychology and circumstances of a character could be communicated on screen.



Because of the murky, moody lighting in the film, *Citizen Kane* is often referred to as an early example of film noir, a genre that features stark and dramatic black and white photography. Other famed film noir movies: *Sunset Boulevard* ([page 28](#)), *Blade Runner* ([page 144](#)), *Sin City*, *Green Velvet*, and *Memento*.



Welles cowrote and directed the film and played the lead role in the movie at age 25.



Charles Foster Kane, during his big speech while running for governor.



- ★ **Charles Foster Kane is widely believed to be based on William Randolph Hearst, the very powerful owner of a publishing empire in the late 19th and early 20th century. (Modern equivalents are guys like Rupert Murdoch, owner of News Corporation, and Sumner Redstone, founder of Viacom.) Hearst did his best to prevent the film from being made, and when he failed he tried using blackmail and smear campaigns to keep exhibitors from showing it.**

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

**Xanadu:** Kane's extravagant fortress, in which he died alone. "Xanadu" is now used to refer to an over-the-top estate, typically owned by someone very rich and perhaps somewhat reclusive or eccentric. Some shopping malls and vacation resorts of today have borrowed the name Xanadu.

**The sled scene:** A young Kane can be viewed out a window playing with a sled in the snow, while his parents, who are inside, prepare to send him off to boarding school. The scene is often cited as

great example of the deep-focus filming technique.

**Rosebud:** Perhaps the most famous line in movie history (see below). People reference it all the time, and it's been spoofed and invoked on shows such as *The Simpsons*, *The Critic*, *Pinky and the Brain*, and *Mystery Science Theater 3000*.

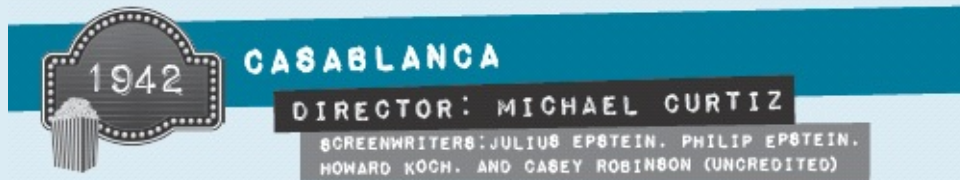
## QUOTABLES

*“Rosebud.”*

This is mysteriously spoken by Kane on his deathbed. The line serves as the jumping off point for the entire movie, as a reporter attempts to figure out what it might mean.

*“You provide the prose poems. I’ll provide the war.”*

Kane says this to his newspaper manager, Mr. Bernstein, when he hears from a reporter that there is no war in Cuba. He’s basically telling Bernstein to make up stories (“prose poems”) to keep newspaper sales up (even though there’s no war). This line is seen as a reference to an alleged quote by publishing giant William Randolph Hearst, who was faced with a similar situation while covering the Spanish American War.



## WHAT IT'S ABOUT

World War II is under way and the Moroccan capital of Casablanca has become a gathering place for displaced foreigners, hustlers, and people trying to flee Hitler's regime. (People had hoped they could get visas to Portugal in Casablanca and then travel to the US.) The hotspot of Casablanca is a bar-cafe named Rick's, owned by Rick Blaine, a cynical American.

Rick typically minds his own business, but one day he becomes the unexpected possessor of two valuable visas that will lead to safe passage out of Casablanca. Soon after, Victor Laszlo, a Czech concentration camp escapee and important Nazi resistance leader, and his beautiful wife, Ilsa, come to Casablanca in desperate need of travel papers to get to America. But Rick is unsympathetic: He and Ilsa were madly in love, before the war, in Paris, and she had left him with no explanation. He never really got over it. Now he has the papers—and the power—to decide who leaves Casablanca and who stays. Over the course of the movie, however, he realizes that there is much more at stake than “the problems of three little people.” He realizes that Laszlo needs Ilsa by his side in order to keep fighting the good fight, and helps them both escape to America—without him.



*Casablanca* was based on the 1940 stage play *Everybody Comes to Rick's* by Murray Burnett and Jean Alisson. Burnett was a 27-year-old English teacher who had gone to help Jewish relatives in 1938 German-occupied Vienna and then come back to the US to write this play.

### Who's In It

**Humphrey Bogart** as Rick Blaine

**Ingrid Bergman** as Ilsa Lund

**Paul Henreid** as Victor Laszlo

**Claude Rains** as Captain Renault

**Peter Lorre** as Ugarte

### More With Humphrey Bogart

*High Sierra* (1941)

*The Maltese Falcon* (1941)

*The Big Sleep* (1946)

*The Caine Mutiny* (1954)

*The African Queen* (1951)

## More with Ingrid Bergman




*For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1943)

*Gaslight* (1944)

*Notorious* (1946)

*Joan of Arc* (1948)

### WHY ALL THE FUSS?

-  Humphrey Bogart's Rick is the iconic vulnerable tough guy—the kind of character he became most famous for playing—and Ingrid Bergman is stunningly beautiful throughout the film.
-  *Casablanca* is funny, well-written, and also a thriller—you're never quite sure what's going to happen or who's on whose side.
-  *Casablanca* was a huge hit when it came out, and it took home several Oscars— for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Screenplay. (Bogart and Rains were also nominated for awards, as was the music, editing, and photography.)



- ★ **Although many people think Rick says “Play it again, Sam” in the movie, he really just says, “Play it, Sam.”**
- ★ **The actors originally slated to star in the lead roles were Ronald Reagan (our former president!) and Hedy Lamarr.**
- ★ **Humphrey Bogart was short. He had to wear platform shoes to play next to the very tall Ingrid Bergman.**
- ★ **The script was changed frequently throughout production; for most of the filming, Bergman herself did not know if her character would stay with Rick or leave with her husband at the end of the movie.**
- ★ **Screenwriters Julius Epstein, Philip Epstein, and Howard Koch were the ones who received an Academy Award for the screenplay. Murray Burnett and Jean Alison always felt this was unfair considering that the movie was based on their play *Everybody Comes to Rick's* (see [page 20](#)).**



Rick tells Ilsa, "We'll always have Paris."

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

**Bogart's belted trench coat and fedora:** It's a classic look of an early 1940s tough guy, made even cooler by the fog that fills (somewhat inexplicably, because it's in the desert climate of Morocco) the famous last scene.

**The "La Marseillaise" scene:** Nazis at Rick's club begin to sing a patriotic German song, and the entire restaurant drowns them out by singing "La Marseillaise," the French national anthem (Morocco is a French territory). It is a patriotic and inspiring moment that unites a random bunch of transients in the face of fascism.

**"As Time Goes By":** The song that Rick and Ilsa called their own when they were in love.

## QUOTABLES

*"Play it, Sam."*

Rick says this to Sam, the bar's piano player, after seeing Ilsa. He's referring to "As Time Goes By," the song he and Ilsa loved when they were together.

*"Of all the gin joints, in all the towns, in all the world, she walks into mine."*

Rick tells Sam he can't believe Ilsa has popped up in his bar.

*"Here's looking at you, kid."*

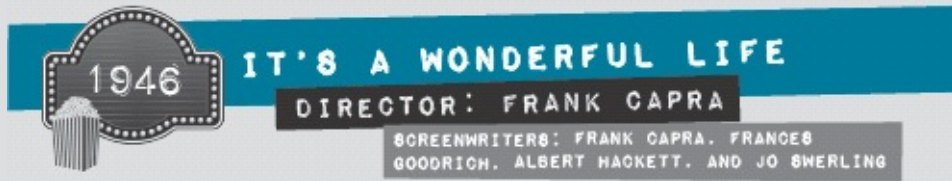
Rick says this to Ilsa at the end; he said the same thing to her back when they were together and happy.

*"We'll always have Paris."*

Rick is referring to when he and Ilsa were together and in love in France before the war. He says this before they part forever.

*"Louis, I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship."*

Rick opens up to Captain Renault, who helps Rick at the end of the movie.



## WHAT IT'S ABOUT

This feel-good holiday classic (that has some dark moments as well) tells the story of George Bailey, a man who once had big dreams of leaving his small town of Bedford Falls but never quite made it out. He was just too responsible and constantly making sacrifices for the good of the community and his family. Married to his high school sweetheart, Mary, George is chained to his job running the local bank (which is the family business), and when the bank falls on hard times, George feels all of his sacrifices were for naught and falls into deep despair.

As he is contemplating suicide, George is visited by Clarence, an angel in need of wings, who shows George what the world would be like if he had never been born. George sees a sad, alternate universe in which his brother Harry has drowned, the town has become rundown and is at the mercy of a nasty banker named Henry Potter (it's even been renamed "Pottersville"), and Mary has become a lonely spinster librarian. Finally, George sees the value of his life and becomes grateful for what he has.

### Who's In It

**James (Jimmy) Stewart** as George Bailey

**Donna Reed** as Mary Bailey

**Lionel Barrymore** as Henry F. Potter

**Thomas Mitchell** as Uncle Billy Bailey

**Henry Travers** as Clarence

### More With Jimmy Stewart


*Mr. Smith Goes  
to Washington* (1939)  
*The Philadelphia Story* (1940)  
*Rear Window* (1954, [page 23](#))  
*Vertigo* (1958)




*It's a Wonderful Life* is based on Philip Van Doren Stern's 1943 short story, *The Greatest Gift*.

## WHY ALL THE FUSS?



 It's a fable about the value of family and friends over riches and fame, and it's been known to bring even the most hard-core cynics to tears. Of course, some people find the movie super sappy and annoying, but it still has its place in history.

 Its copyright expired in the mid-'70s, enabling television stations to play the movie for little or no cost. The result: *It's a Wonderful Life* was on nonstop during the holiday season (often scheduled as counter-programming to other more commercial shows), which helped cement the movie as a seasonal tradition.



## QUOTABLES

*“A toast to my big brother, George, the richest man in town.”*

George's brother, who just returned from the war, proposes this toast in the final scene, after the entire town has raised \$8,000 to keep George from going to jail on Christmas Eve. (George was going to jail because of a big financial mistake made by his uncle.)

*“Look, Daddy. Teacher says, every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings.”*

At the end of the movie, George's daughter reacts when a bell on the Christmas tree rings. The tinkling bell symbolizes that Clarence, George's angel companion, finally got his wings.

## THE STUFF PEOPLE STILL TALK ABOUT

**The phone scene:** George is on the phone and Mary is listening in on the same receiver. Their faces are very close for a very long time, and they clearly want to kiss each other. (They eventually do.) This was considered hot and steamy for the time and is still thought of as a very romantic scene.

**The high school dance scene:** George and Mary are at a high school dance, and the floor opens up and dumps all the dancers into a swimming pool below.

**Zuzu's petals:** During the movie, George is shown what the world would be like without him. At one



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