

Responsibility

by BRIAN LOCKHART

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done. It is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known."

Those were the last words Sidney Carton spoke in the novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, right before losing his head – literally.

A few shorts stepped up to the guillotine, and Carton's head rolled off like a volleyball into a wicker basket.

We were studying the novel in my Grade 12 English class.

For some reason, and in a rare move of frivolity, school staff decided the entire Grade 12 class should watch the 1958 black and white movie version of this classic Dickens novel as a follow-up to the book.

It was a rare fun school hour event indeed, with a full-size screen and a film projector. Our principal at the time was an old curmudgeon who hated to approve anything that students might actually enjoy. He hated his students.

When the lights went on and the movie was finished, I was surrounded by crying girls.

I didn't think the ending was all that sad, other than the guy meeting his fate unjustly and the compassion he had for the scared seamstress he comforted, who was also going to be losing her head.

Movies can produce powerful emotions, even if they are just actors pretending to be someone else.

If there is one movie that I think should be shown in schools to teach a lesson, it would be *The Caine Mutiny*. I would show it to students without explanation and have them think about it before class discussion at a later date.

The Caine Mutiny is also fictional and based on a best-selling novel.

While the story is entertaining all the way through, it is the ending that teaches a terrific lesson.

The story is set in the South Pacific during the height of the Second World War. The *Caine* is a relatively insignificant U.S. naval vessel that is part of the Pacific operation.

You get an inkling of what is going to happen when the ship's captain is relieved, and he makes a derogatory comment about the ship when walking down the gangplank.

He is replaced by Captain Queeg, a regular naval officer, played by the great Humphrey Bogart, who assumes command of the vessel.

The junior officers on the ship are not impressed by the new captain and his strict way of doing things and adhering to navy rules and protocol.

A small group of officers arrange a meeting with Naval Command to complain about the new captain.

While onboard an aircraft carrier and waiting for their meeting, Lt. Keefer, played by Fred MacMurray, watches as the ship's crew falls into line during morning activities.

He quickly encourages his fellow officers to call off the meeting. He realizes that the navy does operate a certain way, and the crew of the Caine are indeed the slackers.

The ship is finally sent on a mission as part of a convoy.

Captain Queeg's behaviour on board is seen as odd and overly strict by the junior officers.

During a fierce storm in the Pacific, the junior officers tell Captain Queeg to manoeuvre the ship into the waves to save it. Queeg refuses, stating they had no orders to change course.

As a result, the one junior officer, backed by the other officers, places Queeg under arrest and takes control of the ship. Thus, they have committed an act of mutiny ? which in many countries will find you at the end of a hangman's noose.

Several of the officers are court-martialed, and a trial ensues.

The officer's lawyer, a navy lawyer, played by Jose Ferrer, manages to get them off of the charges by making Queeg look like an unstable, incompetent captain who placed his ship and his men's lives in peril.

The entire movie turns upside down at the end.

The young officers are having a victory party celebrating the outcome of the trial.

When the lawyer joins the party, he lambasts them, telling them that in order to get them off, he had to 'torpedo' Queeg. He was doing his job as a lawyer, but that included demonizing the captain to make his clients look good ? and he was disgusted by his clients.

He said if the officers had acted like officers and backed the captain like they were supposed to, he would have listened to their concerns. Instead, he couldn't trust his own team.

The junior officers all realized that they were, indeed, the guilty party and had ruined a man's career.

It was a good story about responsibility.

Sorry for the spoiler, but the movie was made in 1954.

You had 69 years!