

Once Upon a Time in the West

1 Watch the film clip with the subtitles to check your answers to the gap-filling exercise.

2 Watch the video clip again and answer the following questions.

1. What kind of landscape is the background of the action?
2. What natural resource does the fictional town contain?
3. How are the two main characters (Frank and Harmonica) portrayed in the movie?



3 Say if these features of the landscape and the people are true or false.

1. Sweetwater is a large city.
2. Sweetwater is rich in water.
3. Jill, Brett MacBain's widow, is young and beautiful.
4. The rail workers are laying down the tracks with modern machines.
5. The nickname 'Harmonica' comes from the musical instrument the character usually plays.
6. Cruel Frank has got comforting brown eyes.

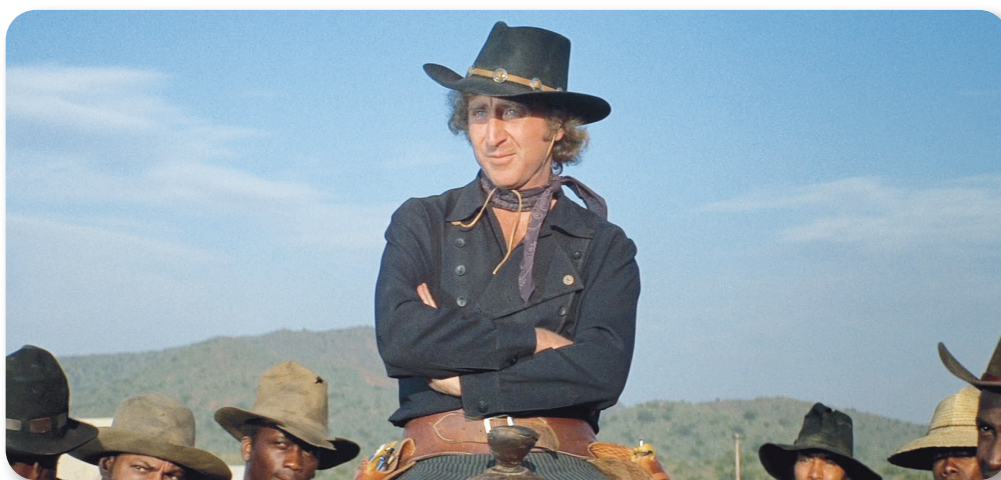
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Blazing Saddles (a parody)

Mel Brooks' parody of *Once Upon a Time in the West*

PRODUCTION	USA 1974
DIRECTOR	Mel Brooks
STARRING	Cleavon Little (Sheriff Bart), Gene Wilder (Jim, the "Waco Kid"), Harvey Korman (Hedley Lamarr), Mel Brooks (Governor William J. Le Petomane), Taggart (Slim Pickens)



A SYNOPSIS

In the American Wild West of 1874, the construction of a new railroad must pass through Rock Ridge, a frontier town inhabited exclusively by white people with the surname Johnson. An unscrupulous politician, State Attorney General Hedley Lamarr, wants to force Rock Ridge's residents to abandon their town, thereby lowering land prices. After he sends a gang of criminals, led by his assistant Taggart to **shoot** the sheriff and devastate the town, the people demand that Governor William J. Le Petomane **appoint** a new sheriff to protect them. Lamarr persuades the **dumb** Governor to nominate Bart, a black railroad worker who is going to be **hanged**. A black sheriff, Lamarr thinks, will offend the inhabitants of Rock Ridge, create chaos and leave the town at his **mercy**. The new Sheriff Bart is a sophisticated man who, after some difficulties, gets the loyalty of the townspeople; so in the end, he, a reformed alcoholic **outlaw** (Jim, the *Waco Kid*) and the entire town decide to stand against the politician's forces and win the battle. The film is a parody of many popular Western films, *Once Upon a Time in the West* in particular. It is full of gags and ironic language.

The movie opens with our hero Bart working on a black railroad crew. His white bosses are super racist and put no value on a person's life. The boss Taggart sends Bart and a friend to check out some quicksand up ahead of the tracks they are laying. The two friends barely emerge from the quicksand alive.

4 Now watch the film clip and fill in the script with the following expressions:

come on boys • Get on that handcar • is going here • is the world rising • it was 120 degrees
 • let me ask you something • the surveyors say • to check out the ground • to jump around •
 to tell a family secret • When you were slaves • you dummy

Boss: Come on boys. The way you're **lollygagging** around here with **them** picks and them shovels, you'd think (1) It can't be more than 114 degrees... [*a Chinese worker falls down and it is taken away by other workers*] **Dock** that chink¹ a day's pay for **napping** on the job.

Worker: Yes, Sir...

Boss: Now, (2), where's your spirit? I don't hear no singing. (3)
, you sang like birds. Come on, how about a good old nigger¹ song...

Black workers: Nigger work song!?



1. chink, nigger: very offensive words for a Chinese and a black person respectively.

to appoint: *nominare*
 to dock: *tagliare*
 dumb: *stupido, sciocco*
 hanged: *impiccato*
 to lollygag: (*fam.*) *fare gli stupidi*

mercy: *mercè*
 to nap: *schacciare un pisolino*
 outlaw: *fuorilegge*
 shoot: *sparare a, uccidere (con arma da fuoco)*
 them: (*pop.*) those.

Bart: [*starts singing*] “I get no **kicks** from champagne...”

Taggart: What in the wide, wide world of sport (4)? I hired you people to try to get a little track **laid**, not (5) like a **bunch** of Kansas City **fagots**!

Boss: Sorry, Mr. Taggart, I guess we kind of **got caught up**.

Taggart: Listen **dummy**, (6) they may have run into some **quicksand** up ahead. Better check it out.

Boss: Okay, I’ll send down a team of horses (7)

Taggart: Horses! We can’t **afford** to lose no horses, (8)! Send over a couple of niggers.

Boss: Okay, Mr. Taggart. You and you...

Bart: Sir... Sir, he has specifically requested two niggers, but (9), my grandmother was a Dutch.

Boss: (10) and take it down to the end of that line!

Bart: Just trying to help you out...

Boss: Get!

Charlie: I didn’t know your grandmother was Dutch...

[*They start singing while they are pushing the handcar*] “Oh, the Comptown Ladies sing this song doo-da doo-da”

Charlie: Bart?

Bart: What?

Charlie: Am I wrong or (11)

Bart: I don’t know, but whatever it is, I hate it... Hey, Charlie, (12)
What is it that is not exactly water and it **ain’t** exactly earth...

Bart and Charlie: Quicksaaand!!!

ain’t: (*slang, qui*) isn’t
to afford: *permetterci il lusso*
bunch: (*qui*) *branco*
dummy: *imbecille*
fagot: (*slang spreg.*) *checca, frocio*

to get caught up: *farsi prendere, trascinare*
kicks: (*fam.*) *eccitazione, godimento*
to lay (laid- laid): *posare*
quicksand: *sabbie mobili*

5 Discuss the following topics:

1. How white people are characterized.
2. How Black Bart is portrayed.
3. What term is used to refer to black rail workers.

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