**IB Film: Year Two, W 45.1**

**Kurosawa—Significant Films**

Yojimbo and A Fistful of Dollars

To witness the influence and similarities between Kurosawa’s *Yojimbo* and Leone’s *A Fistful of Dollars*, watch the split screen comparison, below.

Then, for a more indepth look at these two films, watch *The Remaker* following.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DeoPFQq4_UU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iAC1x7Subls>

## Established Kurosawa

You may recall that previously we looked at Akira Kurosawa's early career, including the first director for whom he worked and the interesting production conditions dictated by working in a country at war, then under occupation, and then as a sovereign state in the 1950s.

By the late 1950s, Kurosawa had established himself has one of the most significant filmmakers in the world.

In 1958, Kurosawa directed The Hidden Fortress, a film that would, along with Rashomon (1950) and Seven Samurai (1954), have a profound influence on filmmakers from outside Japan.

#### [**The Hidden Fortress**](https://platform-preview.pamojaedu.com/courses/134/module/2703/lesson/31939/lesson)

**The Hidden Fortress (1958)**

This film's story is set in feudal Japan and follows two peasants who are returning home from a war between two clans.

They join with a general and a princess from the defeated clan and are tricked into helping them escape the enemy and fight their way back to their allies.

The Hidden Fortress is an 'on the road' adventure of heroic action that also examines morality, greed, valor, and self-discovery. The film is based on early Japanese history, but also clearly shows Kurosawa's interest in Westerns and Hollywood.

The film proved to be significantly important to George Lucas who borrowed the plot for Star Wars: A New Hope (1977) and Star Wars: The Phantom Menace (1999).

Like Kurosawa, Lucas tells much of the story of Star Wars through the point-of-view of two seemingly insignificant characters.

Kurosawa employs peasant farmers in The Hidden Fortress and Lucas uses R2-D2 and C-3PO in Star Wars.

#### [**Sub-plot**](https://platform-preview.pamojaedu.com/courses/134/module/2703/lesson/31939/lesson)

There is some conjecture that at one point Lucas considered optioning the rights to The Hidden Fortress, as the original story outline for Star Wars has many plot elements familiar to anyone who had seen Kurosawa's film.

The Hidden Fortress was also significant because it was the first film Kurosawa shot in full widescreen or CinemaScope (called Toho-Scope in Japan).

Kurosawa made very good use of this wider palette and fills it with beautifully composed action and scenery shots.

## Yojimbo

Kurosawa was a big fan of Hollywood Westerns. He loved the wide-open vistas and the concept of the stoic stranger riding into town to take on the bad guys.

In Yojimbo, a ronin or samurai with no master comes across a small town caught up in a gang war. He decides to take advantage of the situation by playing the rival gangs against each other. The plan works well until he tries to help a captive woman and has to carry on the fight without his sword.

This film sets the stage for many important Westerns that follow in its footsteps.

The samurai Sanjuro is cool, calculating, and seemingly thick-skinned, but with a conscience that will not allow harm to come to innocents.

This is the model for Clint Eastwood's 'the man with no name'.

A Fistful of Dollars (1964), directed by Sergio Leone, is a direct remake of Kurosawa's film, and it made Eastwood a star.

## Red Beard

Red Beard (1965) was very popular in Japan, and while it was a great commercial success, it also represented the end of an era for Kurosawa.

It would be the last film starring one of Kurosawa's favorite leading men, Toshiro Mifune.

Japan's production companies, like those in Hollywood, were feeling the pressure from the television industry.