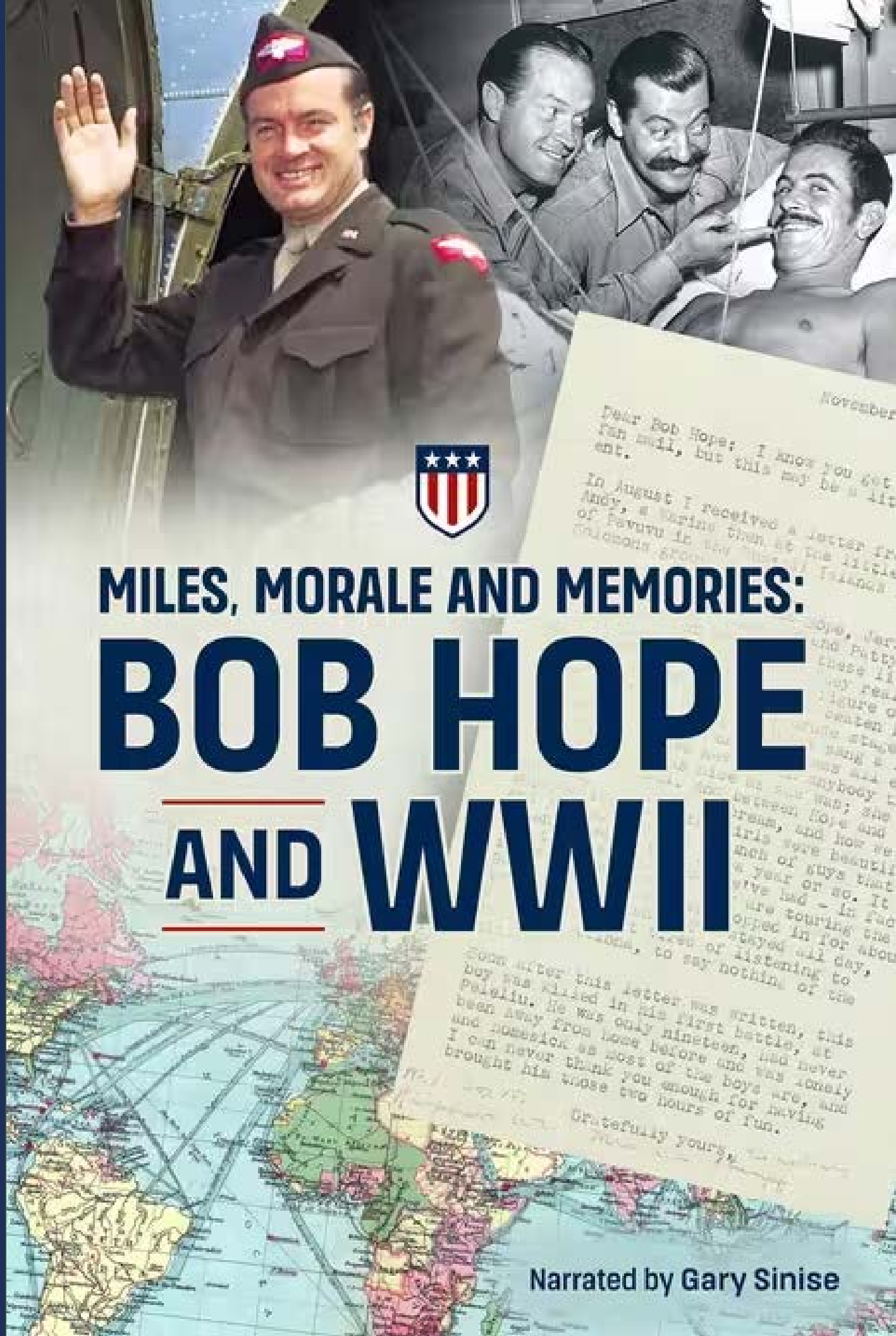




MILES, MORALE AND MEMORIES: BOB HOPE AND WWII

November
Dear Bob Hope: I know you got
fun mail, but this may be a lit-
ent.

In August I received a letter from
Andy, a Marine then at the little
of Pavuvu in New Guinea. I think
Solomon group.

Hope, Jerry
and Patty
these il-
for real-
figure o-
centen-
stage
hang a-
was all a-
anybody
between
between Hope and
dream, and how we
iris were beauti-
such of guys that
a year or so. It
we had - in fact
are touring the
stayed in for about
of listening to
to say nothing of the

Some after this letter was written, this
boy was killed in his first battle, at
Peleliu. He was only nineteen, had never
been away from home before and was lonely
and homesick as most of the boys are, and
I can never thank you enough for having
brought him those two hours of fun.

Gratefully yours,



MILES, MORALE AND MEMORIES: BOB HOPE AND WWII

Discussion Guide

For community screenings, panels, and workshops, and for college courses and seminars



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Facilitation Guidelines

Filmmakers use immersive storytelling to produce intense thoughts and emotions in the viewer. **Journeys in Film** uses this powerful medium as a springboard for meaningful dialogue around humanity's most pressing issues. In this guide, you will find suggestions for leading productive conversations that broaden perspectives, increase global competency, encourage empathy, and build new paradigms for education.

- When watching a film or having a powerful discussion, normalize taking breaks and exercising bodily autonomy. Acknowledge that conversations around complex topics can be vulnerable, complicated, and challenging. Encourage members to voice and do what is right for them without needing to explain or apologize.
- People do their best when they know what to expect. Start and end your meetings on time.
- Share or co-create your intentions for the meeting.
- Create your space. If possible, share snacks or find other ways to create an inviting, comfortable atmosphere.
- Create a trustworthy space. Maintain confidentiality and only speak to your own experience.
- Minimize distractions while you are together. Silence cell phones and devices so you can give your full attention to the conversation.
- Practice whole-body listening. Listen to words, tone, body language, and the feeling in the atmosphere.
- Acknowledge voices that may be absent. Is there a lived experience that isn't represented in your group? Who are the bridge people who might be able to connect you with other people in your community who might bring new perspectives to the table?
- Adopt an attitude of positive intent. If someone says something that bothers you, assume positive intent and ask for more information.
- Ignite your curiosity around other people's views and opinions. Listen to understand, not to respond. You don't need to agree with others in your group or make it known that you are "right" to have a worthwhile conversation.
- Words matter. Be open to learning and practicing new ways to communicate with others.
- Be clear, direct, and kind in your communication. Nobody benefits when you bottle your opinions.
- Everyone has blind spots and biases; cultivate a space of grace as you enter into new territory together.
- If a conversation gets heated, practice acknowledging the tension, pausing as a group, and taking a collective breath together before diving back in or taking a longer break to reset.
- Privilege your relationships with others over the content or agenda of the meeting. Show each other kindness.
- Create a closing ritual that celebrates the time you've spent together and either gives closure or gives members something to think about before your next meeting.

Introduction to the Film



During World War II, Bob Hope and his troupe of entertainers, including Frances Langford, Jerry Colonna, and Patty Thomas, performed for troops at U.S. bases and in the European and South Pacific theaters as part of Hollywood's effort to support the war effort. Their bravery and relentless tour schedule brought Hope's show close to the danger and the front lines in a mission to lift spirits and bring humor and hope to young combat soldiers. The servicemen and their families wrote thousands of letters acknowledging these fearless Hollywood stars' impact on morale, sometimes noting that Hope's show was the last moment of joy before catastrophic battles.

The questions offered in the discussion guide are suitable for individuals, families, small groups, classrooms, and community settings. Whatever the size of your group, try to connect the film to participants' experiences and personal memories about WWII, the use of humor to build morale during difficult times, and the various ways we can serve our country and each other.

Letter from the WWII Foundation

Storytelling is at the core of the WWII Foundation, an organization founded in 2011 with a mission to raise awareness and appreciation, through film, of the many sacrifices made by American men and women in securing our basic freedoms. Humankind is hardwired to respond to “once upon a time,” and the Foundation is singularly positioned to leaven the facts and statistics of history, bringing them to life through stories. Our goal is to instill the lessons the War taught us and make them accessible, relatable, and impactful at no cost to students, educators, veterans, or the public. We don’t produce World War II films. We produce documentary films on individual personal stories from World War II. I think there’s a significant difference.



We educate younger generations about the war. We do not approach this in the way WE think is best. We teach based on how students are learning and what tools they themselves are utilizing today to explore history, whether that be through strong visual storytelling in films that capture their attention and imagination or by utilizing new storytelling technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR).

We distribute much of this content through social media channels, as well as via traditional national and international television networks. We film all these documentaries, narrated by some of the biggest names in television, music, sports, and the movies, in the locations where the events unfolded during the war. Often, we bring back a veteran or survivor with us to where their own individual WWII story began and ended. Our studio is in Europe, the Pacific, and the Far East.

We hope these award-winning films, which rank among the top five most-requested programs nationally by PBS and its affiliates, will motivate not only students but also everyone to learn more about this critical period in world history. The lessons of which still strongly resonate today. We make all these resources available for free to anyone who wants to explore World War II’s impact on the lives of those who lived through it.

- Tim Gray, Writer, Producer, and Director, The World War II Foundation and Tim Gray Media

To learn more about the WWII Foundation visit <https://wwiifoundation.org/about/>

Media Literacy: Hollywood and the War



<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/hollywood-hospitality-hollywood-canteen>

When the United States entered World War II, Hollywood was quickly pulled into the war efforts by the government. Canteens brought celebrity entertainers into contact with troops stateside at dances and social events. Feature films were seen as a powerful way to promote morale and the U.S. view of the war. President Roosevelt called the movie theater a “necessary and beneficial part of the war effort,” according to a March 1942 quote in the Motion Picture Herald. While mostly voluntary, Hollywood was charged with making patriotic films that supported the U.S. position in the war as virtuous and essential. Foreign enemies were often portrayed using simple or even racist characteristics, especially in animation, where it was easier to overexaggerate physical features. With the support of the USO, traveling performers took their music and comedy shows directly to servicemen all over the world. The movies brought comfort and hope to Americans at home, while the traveling shows were an important break for the soldiers who were facing dangerous situations.



In June 1942, the Office of War Information was created to provide official government outreach to the public. The Bureau of Motion Pictures fell under this new agency, effectively putting Hollywood at the mercy of the government. The two entities negotiated as they tried to find common ground and work together, and they eventually succeeded.

After the war, the government continued to try to influence the power of Hollywood by creating the HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee), a committee that worked to blacklist entertainers and creators who were not in alignment with the official U.S. views.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think it is appropriate for Hollywood to make movies supporting the U.S. war effort? Should there be boundaries or limits between national security and artistic freedom concerning the government's influence over creative production? Should those boundaries change during war compared to peacetime?
2. How is narrative film more effective at influencing citizens than obvious propaganda? What are the advantages and dangers of using film deliberately in this manner? Can you think of examples of subtle messaging in a film that changed your viewpoint?
3. What problems arise when we learn about history or current events through entertainment (also called edu-tainment)? What questions could media-literate viewers ask as they watch films and shows depicting real-life events, to ensure they are exposed to different perspectives? Are there benefits to learning about history or current events through entertainment?
4. List examples of movies that depict the United States in international affairs. Analyze examples that are positive and others that are problematic to understand how they work.
5. Do you see similar government influence over entertainment today? How might social media and streaming platforms compare to the wartime Hollywood studio system in terms of message control? Is it more diverse and democratic, or are audiences siloed by their algorithms?

Bob Hope: From Class Clown to G.I. Bob



Bob Hope, born Leslie Townes Hope in 1903, immigrated from England when he was five years old with his parents and six brothers to Cleveland, Ohio. His family was of modest means, and he was known as the class clown in school. By 22, he was performing in vaudeville variety shows.

A successful entertainer, he moved onto the bigger stages of Broadway, then to radio, and eventually signed a film contract with Paramount Pictures, where he made successful comedies throughout the 1940s, including those with comedy partner Bing Crosby. During this time, he also began his work with the United Services Organizations, or USO, the nonprofit organization that provides entertainment to U.S. service members. Hope delivered hundreds of variety shows for soldiers while maintaining a brutal schedule of travel, writing and performing in up to six shows a day—sometimes from the back of a flatbed truck near the front lines—as well as acting in films and visiting wounded soldiers. While his shows for the troops began during World War II, his commitment to the men and women who served led him to perform for the troops throughout his life, and in 1997, President Clinton named him an “Honorary Veteran.”



Discussion Questions

- 1.** After Pearl Harbor was bombed, Bob Hope tried to enlist in the military but was told his skills could be used in a better way, and he was recruited to entertain the troops. What does this suggest about the value of entertainment and mental health during wartime?
- 2.** How did Bob Hope's vaudeville background—including constant travel, multiple daily performances, and the need to quickly read different audiences—prepare him for the challenges of entertaining troops during WWII?
- 3.** How did Bob Hope's immigrant background and rise from modest beginnings potentially help him connect with soldiers from diverse backgrounds?
- 4.** Hope did not perform solo; he formed a group that included Frances Langford, Patty Thompson, Jerry Colona, and Tony Romana. Compare the importance of relationships and trust in a vaudeville troupe to that in a military unit.
- 5.** The grueling schedule of five to six shows daily, often performed at the front lines before major battles, created intense pressure and danger for Hope's troupe. How do you think this shared hardship affected their performances and their connection with the troops?
- 6.** What do you think motivated Hope to continue his USO performances after WWII ended?

Laughter as Medicine



***"I have seen what a laugh can do.
It can transform almost unbearable fears into something bearable, even hopeful."
- Bob Hope***

Most of us have been in a situation that is dire: the hospital with a sick family member, a tense meeting, or even a funeral, and found ourselves laughing in the face of sadness or extreme stress. While potentially awkward, this is a normal human response that is essential for survival. Laughter brings people together in difficult situations, lowers cortisol, and even boosts our immune systems.

The role of laughter in building morale and resilience during WWII was harnessed through Bob Hope's vaudeville-style shows for the troops. His drive and commitment were as unparalleled as his belief that humor was an essential coping mechanism. Just in the summer of 1944, he and his fellow performers traveled 30,000 miles and put on 150 shows. His office was receiving thousands of letters a week from servicemen asking him to perform as a much-needed relief from the hardships of war.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** Based on the clips in the documentary, how do you think each performer's role and type of entertainment (singing, sketches, eye candy) contributed to the overall impact of the show? Would the shows have been as powerfully entertaining if Hope performed alone?
- 2.** Considering the troupe performed so close to battle zones, sometimes hours before deployment, how was the impact on morale heightened for the servicemen? How might the proximity to danger and possibly death affect the servicemen and the performers?
- 3.** Today, we understand more about trauma, PTSD, and mental health support for veterans. How might Bob Hope's intuitive understanding of laughter as medicine compare to modern therapeutic approaches? Do you think there could be a long-term, positive effect on soldiers' mental health because of the shared laughter during a high-stress situation?
- 4.** Reflect on the role of laughter in your own life during tough or grim times. How has it made things "bearable, even hopeful"? Can you think of a specific moment when laughter helped you or someone you know get through a difficult situation? What made that laughter particularly powerful or healing?

Impact on Families



<https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/mail-call-moving-letter-within-letter>

The significant impact of Bob Hope's shows extended beyond the troops to touch the lives of the service members' families. At one point, Hope's office received up to 38,000 letters a week from soldiers requesting a show or thanking him for a show they attended. His secretary, sensing their importance, saved the letters, creating an extensive archive of firsthand accounts of the war. Some of the letters were humorous and lighthearted, while others were gut-wrenching. Part of what made them so powerful was that they were sincere messages that linked families separated by war. These letters were a balm to families—in some cases, they were soldiers' last letters home before death, and they described Hope's show and the temporary relief and joy they had found in laughter. Hope's commitment to the service members went beyond performing. He would also visit them in the field hospitals and call their families to offer sympathy and comfort.



Discussion Questions

- 1.** Imagine the impact of receiving a letter describing a fun time at a Bob Hope show to a family who missed or recently lost their son. What kind of comfort do you think it provided during a time of uncertainty or grief?
- 2.** What do you think motivated Hope to maintain such a grueling travel and performance schedule throughout the war? What does this commitment reveal about his character and love for his country and service members?
- 3.** How might Hope's background as an immigrant who gained significant success have impacted his desire to serve his country?
- 4.** Hope's secretary's foresight to save the letters created a significant primary source archive of tens of thousands of letters from ordinary men and women. How might these letters provide a richer and more nuanced history of the war than official military records?
- 5.** What do you think the effect of carrying the emotional weight of soldiers' stories and fears had on Hope and the other performers?

Additional Resources

Timeline of WW2

<https://wwiifoundation.org/timeline-of-wwii/>

“Hollywood Went to War in 1941, and It Wasn’t Easy”

Article by the Smithsonian Institute about Hollywood’s involvement in World War II

<https://americanhistory.si.edu/explore/stories/hollywood-went-war-1941-and-it-wasnt-easy>

Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation

The Bob & Dolores Hope Foundation supports organizations that bring HOPE to those in need and those who served to protect our nation.

<https://bobhope.org/>

USO (United Services Organizations)

Learn about the work the USO does to support enlisted military through entertainment, from live concerts and shows to on-demand.

<https://www.uso.org/>

Library of Congress exhibition: “Bob Hope and the American Variety”

Bob Hope was among the 20,000 vaudeville performers working in the 1920s. Many of these performers were, like Hope, recent immigrants to America who saw a vaudeville career as one of the few ways to succeed as a “foreigner” in America. Throughout his extraordinary professional career of nearly seventy years, Bob Hope practiced the arts he learned in vaudeville and perpetuated variety entertainment traditions in stage musical comedy, motion pictures, radio, television, and the live appearances he made around the world in support of American armed forces. Today, the stage variety show is mostly a memory, but its influence is pervasive thanks to the long and rich careers of vaudeville veterans like Bob Hope.

<https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bobhope/>

“Laughter as medicine: A systematic review and meta-analysis of interventional studies evaluating the impact of spontaneous laughter on cortisol levels”

Read a journal article about the science of laughter as medicine.

<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10204943/>

HelpGuide mental health resources

Website with useful information about why laughter is good for you and how to develop your own sense of humor

<https://www.helpguide.org/mental-health/wellbeing/laughter-is-the-best-medicine>



Film Credits

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