

Educational Activity

***The Main Difficulties Encountered by Cinema  
in Quebec Between 1896 and 1930***

**Guidelines**

**Silent Cinema in Quebec, 1896-1930**

[www.cinemamuetquebec.ca](http://www.cinemamuetquebec.ca)

# THE MAIN DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY CINEMA IN QUEBEC BETWEEN 1896 AND 1930

## Activity A: Sunday Laws

## Activity B: Censorship

### OBJECTIVES

Using film clips and newspaper articles from the period, introduce and educate students on the main difficulties encountered by cinema in Quebec between 1896 and 1930. Though cinema was a popular form of entertainment, the political community and the Catholic Church sternly criticized it.

### DETAILS

#### Length

- ❖ Activity A, 75 minutes
- ❖ Activity B, 120 minutes

#### Materials

- ❖ Articles from Quebec press of the period
- ❖ The “animated view” *A Sailor’s Heart* (Biograph, 1912), available at [www.cinemamuetquebec.ca](http://www.cinemamuetquebec.ca)
- ❖ Internet link: Régie du cinéma québécois ([www.rcq.qc.ca](http://www.rcq.qc.ca)), and more particularly the webpage « History of Régie du cinéma » ([http://www.rcq.qc.ca/la\\_regie/historique.asp](http://www.rcq.qc.ca/la_regie/historique.asp))

#### Instructions

- ❖ Students work in groups of four for the completion of the chart.
- ❖ For the debate, divide the class in two.

## ACTIVITY A: Sunday Laws

### PREPARATION

1. Provide students with an understanding of Quebec urban society in 1907.
2. Clips from “animated views” of the period should be shown.

Emphasize the following points when discussing the historical context. This will enable students to better understand the reasoning behind censorship and for the closing theatres on Sundays.

- ✓ Difficult working conditions: accidents, long workdays, six-day workweeks and meagre wages.
- ✓ Place and role of women: wives, homebound, raising children, some women begin entering workforce.
- ✓ Prominent place of the Catholic Church: Mass, prayer before supper, control of education and health care.

### ACTIVITIES

In 1907, a petition is drafted to close cinemas on Sundays. Some are in favour of the petition, others against.

**This subject can be approached in two ways:**

- ❖ **PART 1: CHART**
- ❖ **PART 2: DISCUSSION**

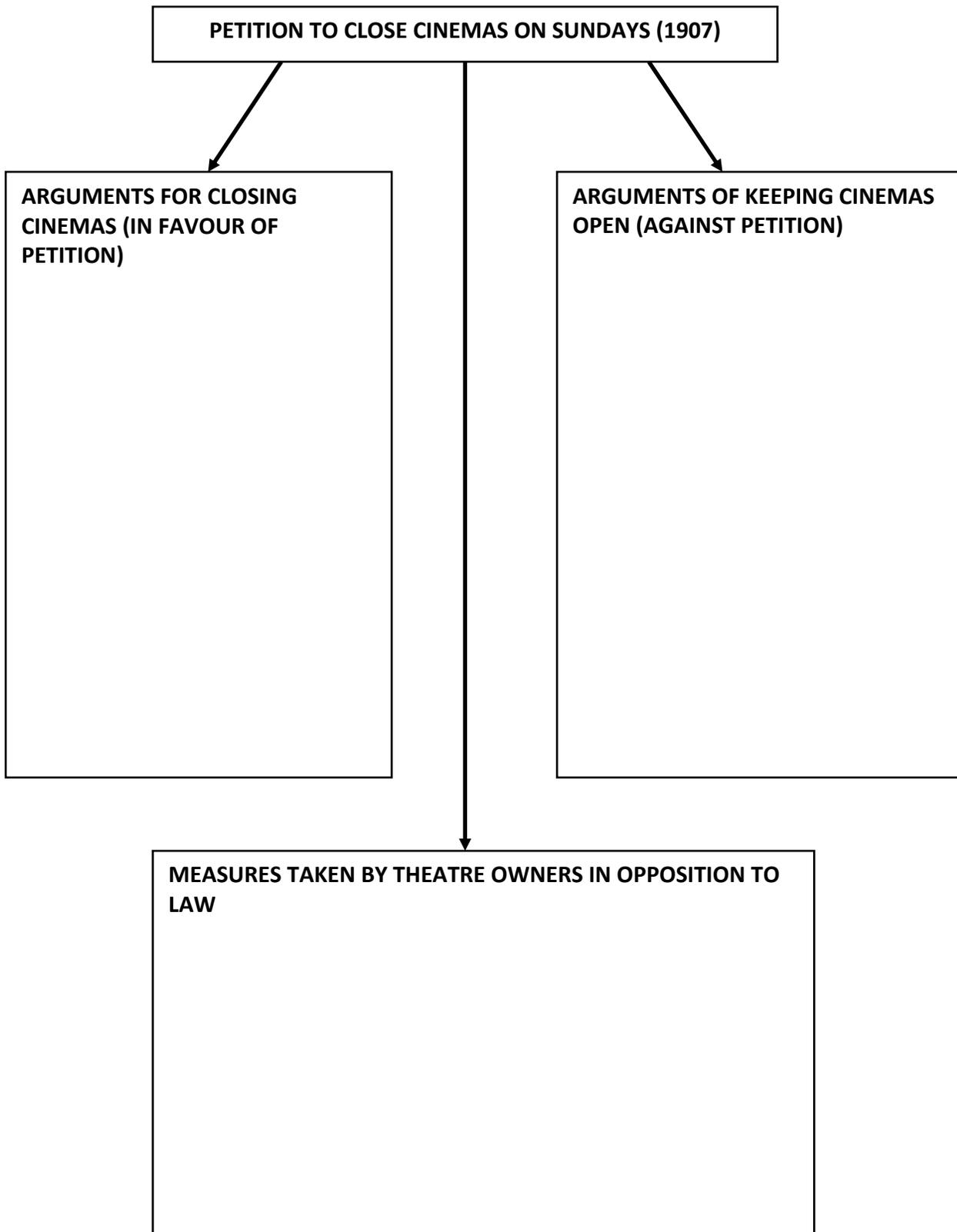
#### **PART 1**

Students should work in groups of four to complete the chart below using articles from the Quebec press of the period. Students should identify the following: the reasons invoked by the Church; reasons linked to working conditions; reasons related to health concerns. Once completed, bring the groups together, check the answers, and discuss the merits and soundness of the arguments.

#### **PART 2**

The class is divided in half. Students work in groups of four and each group selects a spokesperson. One side of the class will adopt the arguments of those wanting to close cinemas on Sundays and the other those wanting to keep cinemas open. Students should support their arguments by finding information in articles from the early Quebec press, such as the reasons invoked by the Church, reasons related to working conditions and reasons related to health. The instructor moderates the debate and ensures that the historical context is respected and that the arguments remain on topic. The chart can be used to stimulate and structure the debate.

**PART 1: CHART**



## PART 2: DEBATE

### GROUP REVIEW OF ACTIVITY 2

#### **PART 1: Chart**

Check answers with students (see corrections below). Highlight the role of the Catholic Church clergy, while also showing that cinema was well established in Quebec society.

#### **PART 2: Debate.**

After the debate, briefly review the responses. Ensure that the main arguments were mentioned and that the historical context was respected.

Finally, keeping in mind these elements, were there any parts of the debate that received more attention?

### ANSWERS

#### ❖ Arguments for closing theatres on Sundays

- Religious
  - ✓ Sundays are sacred and should be dedicated to prayer.
  - ✓ Families need a time for spending together.
  - ✓ Screening moving pictures to children and girls is immoral. Children should be in school.
  - ✓ Young people should be reading or playing sports instead.
  - ✓ Moving pictures show obscenities (deaths, revenge, crime, violence, murder, etc.) as well as containing improper and vulgar scenes.
  - ✓ Films pander to audiences' dark side. They awaken savage instincts in spectators.
  - ✓ Some films make reference to divorce.
  - ✓ Theatres are dark.
  - ✓ Films are commercial entertainment
- Health
  - ✓ Hygiene problem: flickering screen affects eyesight.
  - ✓ Theatres are dangerous and unsafe.

#### ❖ Arguments for keeping theatres open on Sundays

- Religious
  - ✓ Religious practice not affected since screenings only start in the afternoon.
  - ✓ Even the church is commercialized: admission fee for Midnight Mass; singers and invited preachers are paid.
  - ✓ Everything non-essential would also have to be shut down (tramways, taxis, coaches, telephones, etc.)
- Quality of life
  - ✓ Amusement and leisure is relaxing after a week of work.
  - ✓ Healthy recreational activity for young people: prevents them from drinking heavily, loitering, disturbing the peace, gathering in clubs, going to Montmorency Falls.
  - ✓ Prevents men from pointlessly drinking their wages away.
  - ✓ Amusement parks (Sohmer and Dominion) have the right to remain open.
  - ✓ There is a lack of libraries, parks and gyms to stimulate youth.

- ✓ Films provide window onto people and landscapes of Quebec and the world. A form of “travel.”
- ❖ Measures taken by owners in opposition to law
  - ✓ Law contested in court to show it was unconstitutional.
  - ✓ Offered free screenings and asked for voluntary donations.
  - ✓ Screenings were free with the purchase of 10 cents or more in candies.
  - ✓ Tickets were sold as usual, owners paid fines.
  - ✓ Revenues from screenings on one Sunday evening per month were donated to charity.
- ❖ Arguments for keeping theatres open on Sundays
  - Religious
    - ✓ Religious practice not affected since screenings only start in the afternoon.
    - ✓ Even the church is commercialized: admission fee for Midnight Mass; singers and invited preachers are paid.
      - ✓ Everything non-essential would also have to be shut down (tramways, taxis, coaches, telephones, etc.)
  - Quality of life
    - ✓ Amusement and leisure is relaxing after a week of work.
    - ✓ Healthy recreational activity for young people: prevents them from drinking heavily, loitering, disturbing the peace, gathering in clubs, going to Montmorency Falls.
    - ✓ Prevents men from pointlessly drinking their wages away.
    - ✓ Amusement parks (Sohmer and Dominion) have the right to remain open.
    - ✓ There is a lack of libraries, parks and gyms to stimulate youth.
    - ✓ Films provide window onto people and landscapes of Quebec and the world. A form of “travel.”
- ❖ Measures taken by owners in opposition to law
  - ✓ Law contested in court to show it was unconstitutional.
  - ✓ Offered free screenings and asked for voluntary donations.
  - ✓ Screenings were free with the purchase of 10 cents or more in candies.
  - ✓ Tickets were sold as usual, owners paid fines.
  - ✓ Revenues from screenings on one Sunday evening per month were donated to charity.

## ACTIVITY B: CENSORSHIP

### PREPARATION

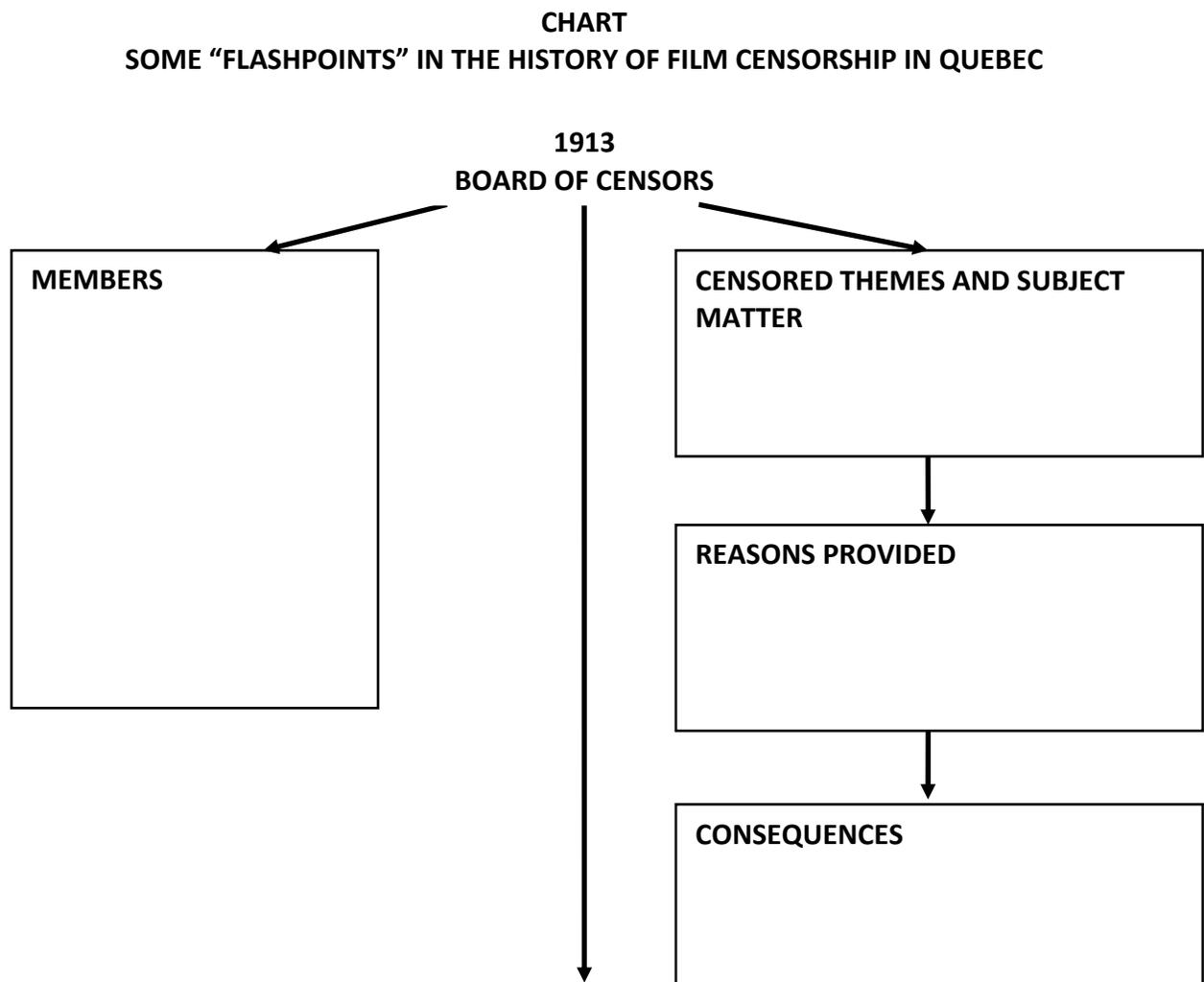
1. Have students reflect on the practice of censorship.

- ❖ What is censorship?
- ❖ Does censorship still exist today?
- ❖ Is there currently a censorship office?

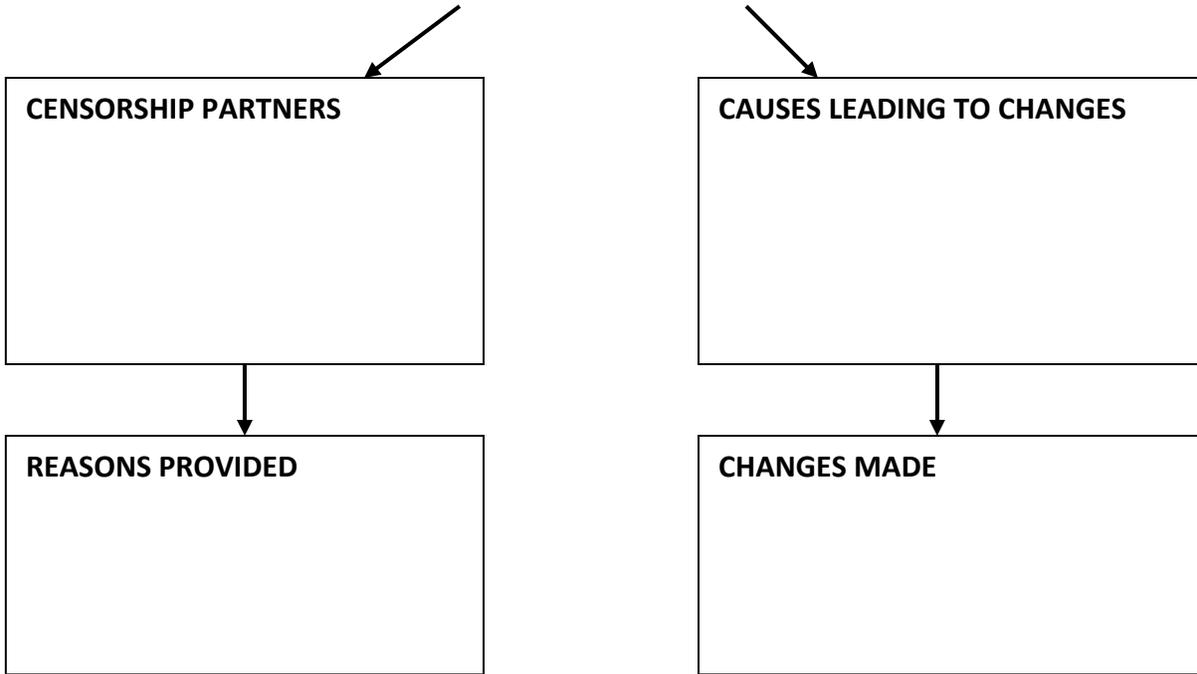
2. Screen the film *A Sailor's Heart* (1912). After viewing, ask students to think about those aspects of the film that may have been censored in 1912.

### ACTIVITY

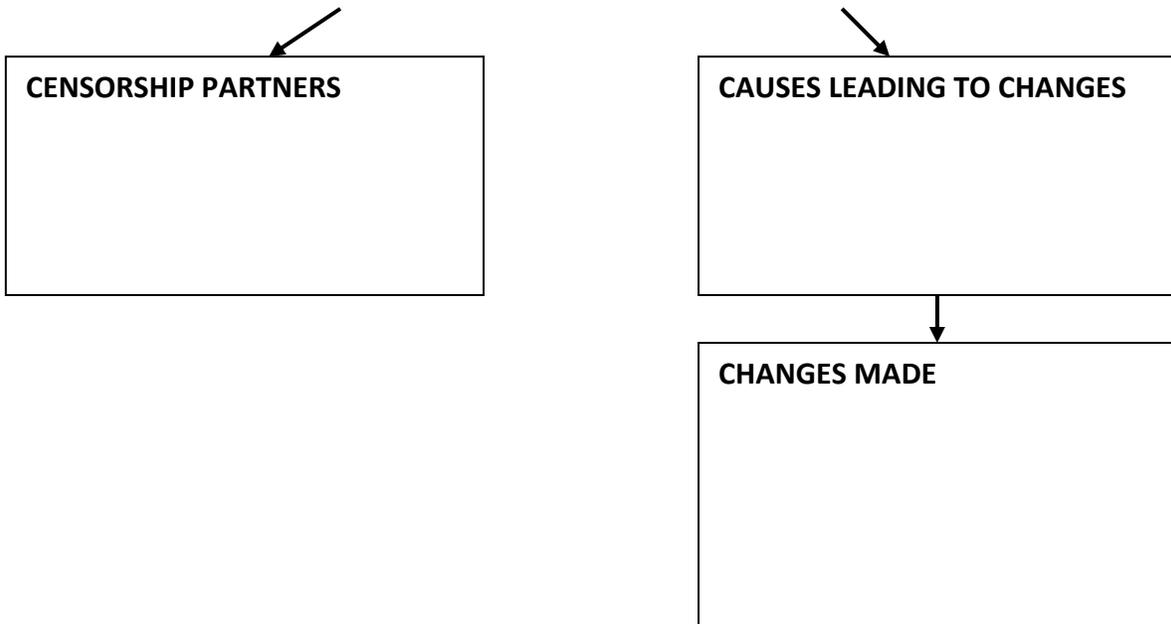
After reading articles from the early and recent press, complete the chart.

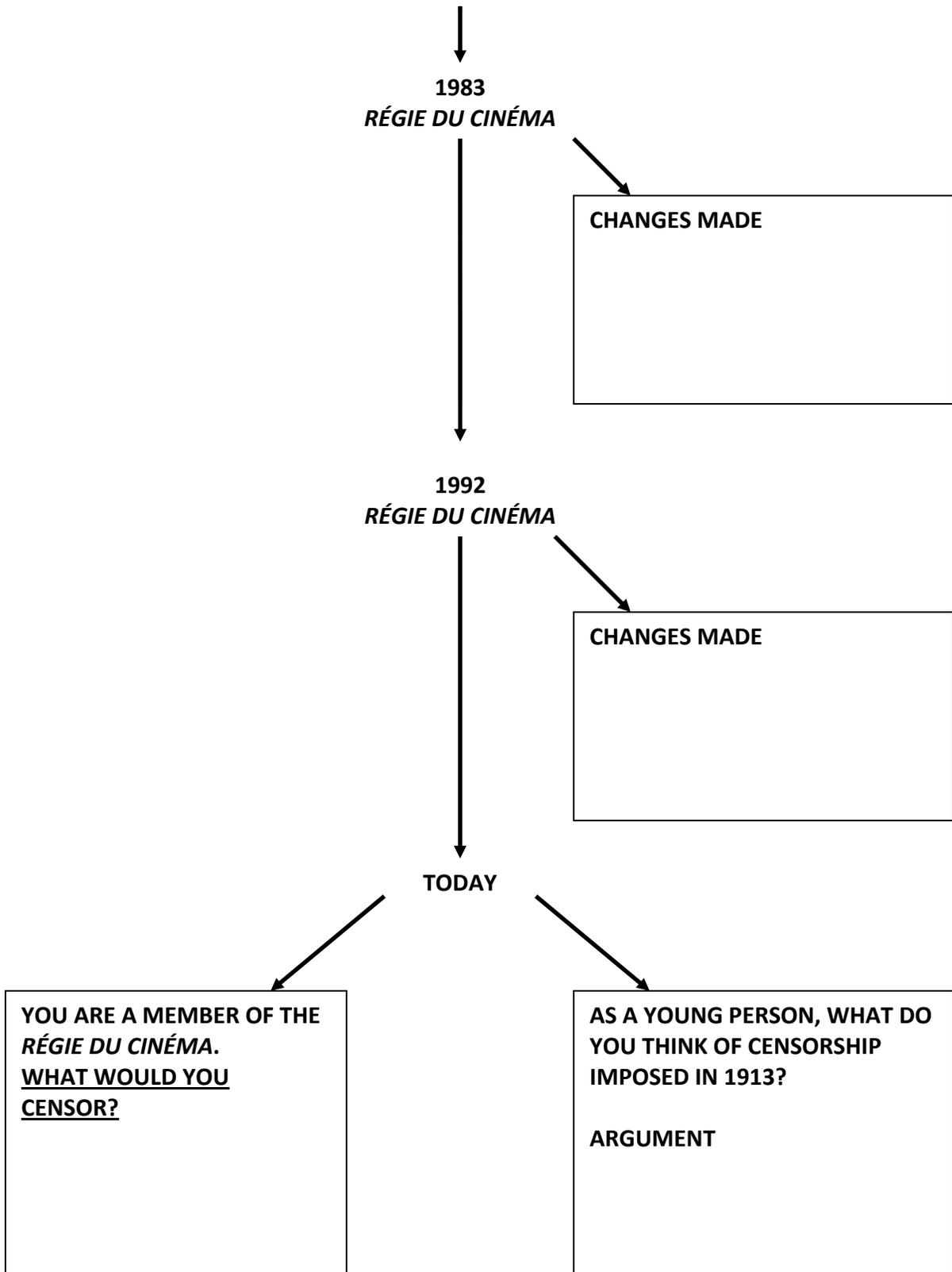


**1927  
BOARD OF CENSORS**



**1967  
BUREAU DE SURVEILLANCE DU CINÉMA**





### GROUP REVIEW OF ACTIVITY 3

- ✓ Check answers with students (answers below).
- ✓ Emphasize the influence the political community and the Catholic Church had on cinema between 1913 and 1930. The Church was more concerned with the morality of cinema, while politicians were concerned with issues of patriotism.
- ✓ Changes in censorship laws typically reflected changes occurring in Quebec society over the same period.
  
- ✓ **Important: the last part of the chart (TODAY) will give students an opportunity to offer their opinions on censorship. This can serve as an entrance point to discussing the difficulties encountered by cinema in Quebec between 1895 and 1930**

### ANSWERS

#### 1913, BOARD OF CENSORS

- ❖ Members: Montreal sheriff, L. J. Lemieux; secretary, G. Bélanger; deputy, J. Walsh; deputy, M. Sinn.
- ❖ Censored themes and subject matters: immoral scenes, vulgarity, lewdness, improper behaviour, armed robbery, violence, murder, fighting, ridiculing religion or its ministers, anti-patriotism, excessive display of American flag.
- ❖ Reasons provided: since audiences consisted mostly of children, moving pictures can negatively affect their views and judgment; “moving pictures are the cause of many crimes, and Americans have a different mentality and are more violent, among other things, than Quebecers.”
- ❖ Consequences: stamp of approval from office of censorship required; theatre owners must pay a sum for each ticket sold; some owners pay fines; American companies cease delivery of films to Quebec; many reels of film are withdrawn; police intervention; some films are cut to the point of becoming difficult to follow.

#### 1927, BOARD OF CENSORS

- ❖ Cause: fire at Laurier Palace leading to the death of 78 children.
- ❖ Changes: security standards become more severe, children below the age of 16 forbidden from theatres.
- ❖ Censorship partners: Catholic Church, Quebec premiers (Taschereau, Duplessis)
- ❖ Reasons provided: immorality, youth crime, communism.

#### 1967, BUREAU DE SURVEILLANCE DU CINÉMA

- ❖ Causes: change in moral outlook, social values and general mentality of people (Quiet Revolution)
- ❖ Changes: films rated according to age.
- ❖ Censorship partners: police, priests, Jean Drapeau (mayor of Montreal)

#### 1983, RÉGIE DU CINÉMA

- ❖ Changes: restrictions on distribution rights; closer supervision of the activities of distribution companies; ensuring the presence of the French language in films; rejection of films

containing some forms of sexual violence, exploitation of children and dehumanizing behaviour.

1992, RÉGIE DU CINÉMA

- ❖ Changes: mandate to rate DVD and videotapes.