***Wanda the Wonderful – Educational Themes, Discussion topics***

*Wanda the Wonderful* offers an honest, personalized, historical account of an independent woman’s life in the American West. The stories and accomplishments of strong female characters of the past have been left behind in favor of their male counterparts.  It is critical that we begin to uncover these hidden stories of women's lives that reach beyond the confines of beauty and husbands. By bringing Wanda's amazing story to light, the film aims to chip a little bit away from the usual stereotypes of women presented by the media, and offer up a different, exciting and challenging option.

Those who write history, make history. Evidence based media serves as an historical document, and “Wanda the Wonderful” is poised to take a its rightful position on the shelf in the annals of American Western history. As such, this film is a great candidate for education in areas of: Women’s Studies, Women’s History, Western American history, Gender studies, and related areas of scholarship.

Discussion Topics:

Re Showbusiness:

* What happened to the female stars and heroines of the old “Western movies” silent movies of the 1920’s? Why have they been largely forgotten despite enjoying equal billing as their male contemporaries? (See “Cowgirls: Women of the Wild West”, by Elizabeth Clair Flood and William Manns, copyright 2000, Zon International Publishing Company.)
* Look at how Wanda is apart of this trajectory of women celebrated, successful, then largely forgotten by history.
* The demise of Vaudeville and Wild West shows, how did performers transition into other media, or not? And what happened to them?

Re women’s employment in the 1920’s & 1930’s

* A woman working in brothel by necessity – from the female perspective, NOT the male gaze.
* Employment for women in times of liberation of the 1920s and 1930s – how did this affect Wanda’s own decisions?

Re the American West, Pioneer, Rancher

* Women were a vital part of pioneering families – not weak willed but hard working, creative, powerful, resourceful and necessary for survival!
* How could ranchers have survived without the women making the gardens and feeding everyone?
  + Moving fertile dirt from the mountain to the basin to enhance the soil
  + Composting
  + Gardening
  + Shooting game and fishing for meals

Re Femininity

* Tough women were also smart, sexy and creative.
* Is Wanda’s skillfulness with a gun a threat to a man’s manhood?

Re Gender

* How do people read the film differently – men vs women – people read in it what they want.
  + Did Carl cheat on Wanda with her daughter Bonnie Jean?
* What about Carl?
  + Do you forgive him for sleeping with Wanda’s daughter, when Wanda was dying of cancer?
  + How do you feel about that, about him?
  + Do we more easily forgive him because he is a man?

Re Motherhood

* Double standard of men leaving kids behind for career or otherwise and are not judged. When women do this, they are shamed. Why?
* Question of how different women might experience the role of motherhood – in the sense of full sacrifice. Why can’t a woman run from this responsibility as much as a man? Does that make her evil?
* Question of how families generally survived during the depression, where food was the primary and most important currency. People would leave their children with other families as a means of survival.
* Consider the pre-nuclear family model as being more fluid, kids shuffled around, grandparents living at home, more variations on the theme of family. Was it so bad? Was it better for women?

Re running from one’s past

* The idea of being haunted by your past mistakes and selfishness, and how that can catch up to you. Can you rectify past mistakes or not?