**Module 3: Film Techniques**

Objectives: Through studying this module, you should learn to:

- understand the ways in which still images convey meanings through composition techniques.

- understand the connections between techniques employed in comics and in films.

- understand the use of different types of techniques to convey certain meanings: shots, angles, lenses, lighting, color, sound, editing.

- know how to access and use film databases and review sites.

- understand the evolution of techniques and content in film and television history

- know basic aspects of screenwriting, storyboarding, video production, and editing

- foster critical response to film through classroom discussion and writing

# Visual Literacy: Starting with the Image

A good place to begin the study of film technique is with the still image. By having students first learn to analyze the composition of single images, they can later begin to better understand how images are used within the larger context of a series of moving images.

Understanding how images or signs mean is the study of semiotics. Semiotics focus on how images or signs acquire cultural meanings based on certain codes audiences apply to those images or signs. The meaning of a red image is based on cultural codes for the meaning of red—related to danger, power, sexuality, etc., depending on the cultural context. Or, during the medieval period, images often assumed powerful religious significance. People would destroy images perceived to be sac-religious. Or, they were reluctant to put pictures of people in their bedrooms for fear of being possessed by those people.

Visual literacy is an educational movement that emerged in the 1960s that posited the need for students to become more literate about the visual aspects of their media environment. This includes the ability to understand the uses and power of images in the culture (Gitlin, 2001). It also includes analyzing the compositional elements of images—drawing on art education, as well as the photographical techniques employed in creating images. These meaning of compositional elements and techniques are themselves constituted by cultural codes. For example, the meaning of placing an object or person higher up in a picture or to employ a angle-up shot on an object or person, is tied to cultural notions of power associated with being “higher up” in the social hierarchy.

To study images, students could bring in art-work, photos, ads, drawings, etc., and describe their perceptions of the meanings of these images related to composition, technique, and cultural codes. To find images, they could use the Google search engine and click on the “images” option. Or, they could search the many museum or image collections on the Web (see some in the visual literacy resource list below).

*Composition elements*. In studying the image, students could focus on the relationship or placement of specific objects within the image based on which objects/people are placed in the front/back, upper/lower, left/right of the frame. They could note where their eyes initially falls and then moves to in the frame. This is typically left to right—so ads often place appealing objects on the left side. They could explore reasons for placements of objects/people in the frame—why, for example, someone may be placed in the upper part of the frame based on their power relationships to other people/objects in the frame.

They could also note the balance or symmetrical relationship of objects in the frame, as well as the size and shape of objects—as having a parallel balance or unparalleled or uneven balance. If, for example, one side of the frame contains a lot of large objects and the other, very few small objects, the viewer may pay more attention to the few small objects on the one side.

And, they could not the use of contrast of light and dark images in the frame to attract attention to certain aspects of the image.

For analysis of these structural aspects of an image:

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stcent/lvstructure.html>

In their seminal book, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) describe some of the basic elements of visual composition.

One of those elements is that of the relationships between participants in a frame that suggest certain power hierarchies or narrative relationships. For example, in a beer ad, two people could be looking at each other in a manner that suggests a romantic relationship, a relationship associated with drinking beer. And, these images could also be used to establish a connection between the portrayed people in the image and the audience. Students could identify how certain images serve to imply relationships between people in an image and also between the image itself and the audience.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) also describe some aspects of what they define as modularity: color saturation, differentiation, and modulation; representation, depth, illumination, and brightness. Students could study how varying these features in a digital photo changes the meaning of images. They could first download free editing software, or use available editing software such as PhotoshopTM.

Photoplus <http://www.freeserifsoftware.com/serif/ph/ph5/index.asp>

VicMan's Photo Editor <http://www.vicman.net/vcwphoto/>

Myimager <http://www.myimager.com/>

Students can then vary the images using this software and discuss their responses to these variations. For example, in varying a person’s face color, students may describe their inferences about that person based on differences in their skin color.

*Framing and point of view*. Students could then analyze the relationship of the image to themselves—whether the image places or positions them as close-up versus faraway from an object or person. And they could analyze the perspective the image invites them to adopt in viewing the image—one of an outside voyeur or a insider participant. For activities on framing/point of view: <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stcent/lvframing.html>

THIS IS THE LINK TO THE LESSON AND THREE PHOTOS I USED IN CLASS!

*Images as rhetorical actions*. Students also need to recognize that the meaning of images are based on their rhetorical use to persuade or engage viewers based on social and cultural meanings. The Walker Evans photography of scenes of poverty during the Depression was designed to foster empathy for people experiencing poverty.

Students could analyze how images are used to persuade:

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/21stcent/lmpersuasion.html>

The PBS program, *The Power of Stills*, includes analysis of the use of images in American photography history

<http://www.pbs.org/ktca/americanphotography/teachersguide/stills_parent.html>

*Other resources for visual literacy activities:*

International Visual Literacy Association <http://www.ivla.org>

Visual Literacy resource links <http://www.asu.edu/lib/archives/vislitlinks.htm>

Visual Arts Topics Index <http://librarymedia.org/visual/topics.htm>

Visual Resource Library <http://www.vcu.edu/artweb/library>

Marist College - Visual Literacy Links <http://www.academic.marist.edu/pennings/vislit2.htm>

Visual Literacy and the Net <http://www.fno.org/PL/vislit.htm>

Digital Images and the 'New' Visual Literacy <http://students.washington.edu/gveen/english/visual/>

Visual Literacy Exercises

<http://www.channel1.com/users/bobwb/vlit/ex4_1.htm>

2Learn Teacher Tools: Visual Literacy

<http://www.2learn.ca/teachertools>

University of Iowa Communication Studies Resources: Visual Communication

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/resources/visual.html>

Course Projects and Issues

<http://www.ariadne.org/studio/michelli/classissues.html>

Visual Arts Young Viewers Index

<http://librarymedia.org/visual/youngviewers.htm>

##### A Routledge Journal: Visual Studies

<http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals/routledge/1472586x.html>

### Studying Images through Still Photography

Students could then study images they create through taking still photographs in which they experiment with different types of shots, angles, use of color, and editing (using editing software). Studying stills before moving on to video encourages students to focus on aspects of composition within the frame. By using digital cameras, they can view their images on the computer or project them for the entire class. Students could then identify their specific uses of certain techniques to convey certain intended meaning. For example, they may note that in taking a picture of two objects on either side of the frame—a tree and their dog, that they used the “rule of thirds”—they divided the frame by thirds and placed the tree and the dog in the outer thirds, leaving the middle third empty.

Resources for teaching with photography:

<http://www.learnnc.org/search?aphrase=photography&area=lesson+plans>

For more information on use of digital cameras and photography as art:

Photo-Seminars.com <http://www.photo-seminars.com/pscampus.htm>

Curtin’s Short Courses in Digital Photography <http://www.shortcourses.com/>

Kodak online photographic tutorials <http://www.kodak.com/US/en/nav/takingPics.shtml>

Kodak online guide to better pictures <http://www.kodak.com/global/en/consumer/pictureTaking/index.shtml>

BetterPhoto.com <http://www.betterphoto.com/home.asp>

New York Institute of Photography <http://www.nyip.com/sub_idx_pgs/tipsidx/tips_idx.php>

Photography Basics <http://www.ctlow.ca/Photo/DigitalImage.html>

Digital Image Basics <http://www.ctlow.ca/Photo/DigitalImage.html>

The Art of Photography <http://johnlind.tripod.com/>

Digital Photography Tips <http://www.stonehill.edu/instructional/phototips.htm>

The rules of composition <http://photographytips.com/page.cfm/344>

The American Museum of Photography <http://www.photographymuseum.com/>

###### Comics and film technique

The next step in studying technique is to examine the relationships between still images. One intermediate step involves having students study film techniques as employed in comics, particularly comics that employ imaginative visual techniques. Comic strip and book artists must tell a story through moving readers from image to image, often through changes in focus—moving closer to an object or person (close-up shot) versus further back (long-shot), or positioning readers as looking down on an object or person or up at a person. And, they must set the scene by placing objects or person in some setting (establishing shot).

Students could also study examples of films that are based on comics to examine how the films adopted the comic book style or characters to the screen. For example, the *Spiderman* and *Spiderman II* films employ some of the visual techniques in the original comic book series.

<http://spiderman.sonypictures.com/>

The film, *American Splendor*, about the subject of a Crumb comic book series based on the experiences of a file clerk, Harvey Pekar, incorporates elements of comic book styles into the film itself, in which, for example, characters’ thoughts are shown in bubbles.

<http://www.americansplendormovie.com/main.html>

Comics and films <http://www.tcj.com/240/r_yic2.html>

Comics2film: comics that have been made into films <http://www.comics2film.com/>

Similarly, the CrossGen comics publisher is now producing five of its comics for sale as DVDs in stores or as downloaded files in an attempt to appeal to a younger audience

<http://www.comicsontheweb.com>

Reflecting a further blending of the comic book and film forms, cameras move across panels, actors read the words in balloons, and sound effects are included.

Students could also study the uses of comics to convey social or political messages. For examples, Lalo Alcaraz’s strip, *La Cucaracha*, reflects the satiric perspective of an artist who grew up the U.S./Mexico border, providing him with a outsider “Mexican” perspective on American culture and an ”American” perspective on Mexican culture.

<http://www.ucomics.com/lacucaracha/>

*Links to comics book/graphic novel sites*:

Comics.com: <http://www.comics.com/>

Links to newspaper comic strips and political cartoons

<http://www.ucomics.com/comics/>

Comic books for young adults

<http://ublib.buffalo.edu/libraries/units/lml/comics/pages/index.html>

Marvel Comics

<http://www.marvelcomics.com/flash.htm>

<http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Comics_and_Animation/Comic_Books/Marvel/>

DC Comics <http://www.dccomics.com/>

Webcomics <http://www.webcomics.com/>

Dark Horse Comics <http://www.dhorse.com/>

E-zine: links to Indy Magazine/independent comics

<http://www.indyworld.com/comics/>

No Flying No Tights: reviews of graphic novels for teens

<http://www.noflyingnotights.com/>

Beyond the Funnies: Create Your Own Comics

<http://www.nlc-bnc.ca/comics/t17-6000-e.html>

Comics Font and Lettering <http://www.blambot.com/>

Webquest: Comic Strips <http://edie.home.insightbb.com/toons/>

David Law: Creating Comics <http://members.shaw.ca/creatingcomics/>

Webquest: Create a Super Hero

<http://www.plainfield.k12.in.us/hschool/webq/webq104/>

Read/Write/Think unit: Comics in the Classroom

<http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=188>

For further reading:

Eisner, W. (1994). *Comics and sequential art*. New York: Poorhouse.

Eisner, W. (1996). *Graphic storytelling and narrative art*. New York: Poorhouse.

Gammill, K., & Spurlock, J.D. (2001). *Kerry Gammill's drawing monsters & heroes for film &*

*comics.* New York: Watson-Guptill

Heller, S., & Chwast, S. (2001). *Graphic style: From Victorian to digital*. New York: Harry

Abrams.

Hughers, D. (2003). *Comic book movies*. New York: Virgin.

McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding comics*. New York: Perennial.

O’Neil, D. (2001). *The DC comics guide to writing comics*. New York: Watson-Guptill

Shudo, T. (1999). *The art of Pokemon, the movie: Mewtwo Strikes Back!* New York: Viz.

Film Techniques

Students can then move to studying the relationships between separate shots through analysis of various film techniques employed in cinematography. (For background reading on various techniques, the two best resources are:

Bordwell and Thompson’s (2004) *Film Art*, An Introduction (7th ed.)—for a sample chapter on Film Production, Distribution, and Exhibition:

<http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0072484551/information_center_view0/sample_chapter.html>

Louise Giannetti (2002), *Understanding Movies*, (Prentice Hall, 9th ed.)

For an online study guide to this textbook:

<http://cwx.prenhall.com/bookbind/pubbooks/giannetti/>

Another useful book is James Monaco (2000), *How to View a Film*, (Oxford University Press, 3rd ed.) which is available as a book, as a “multimedia edition” which provides for extensive use of pdf files and visual materials.

<http://www.readfilm.com/>

For English teachers, John Golden (2001), *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom*, (NCTE) is a useful resource because he integrate study of film technique with study of literature based on shared reading strategies--predicting, responding, questioning, and storyboarding, as well as links between aspects of characterization, point of view, and irony in film and literature.

In studying different types of techniques, what’s essential is that students understand the underlying purposes for why filmmakers are using these different techniques. Simply having students memorize a lot of definitions for different techniques will do little good unless they are able to understand the ways in which these techniques are used to develop the storyline, setting, or characters. You may therefore want to have students construct their own script and storyboard (see later material on this) that requires them to apply their knowledge to thinking about purposes for using different techniques.

The meaning of these different techniques is based on a set of Hollywood film conventions in which certain techniques have become associated with certain conventional meanings based on realist representations of the world. However, it is important to recognize that these conventions have been and continue to be violated by more experimental or expressionist filmmakers who do not believe that they need to conform to realist assumptions. For example, most realists attempt to portray a smooth transition between shots so that someone walking through a house moves seamlessly from room to room. Experimental filmmakers may not perceive the need to follow these conventions. They may, for example, employ a set of jump-cuts in which the person is in one side of the house but suddenly appears at the other side of the house.

*Frames*. One of the most basic concepts is the idea of the frame—what is included as well as left out of a shot. This relates to what is known as “off-frame” action—the fact that an audience may be aware of someone or something that is outside of the frame—a lurking murderer. The size and focus of the frame defines the types of different shots employed. Shots also differ in terms of where they position the audience in relationship to the setting, persons, or objects portrayed.

*Establishing/extreme long shot*. A shot that serves to initially set the scene is an establishing shot often framed by an extreme-long shot of a landscape or locale in which characters are only speck in the scene.

*Long-shot*. In contrast to the extreme long-shot, people are now shown at the point to which the audience can view their entire body.

*Medium shot*. A medium shot portrays the people’s bodies from the waist up; in some cases, an over-the-shoulder shot with two people portrays one person looking up or down at the other person. In the 1950s, females were often shown looking up at males, not only because they were often shorter than the males, but also because this shot implied a power imbalance.

*Close-up shot*. A close-up shot often fills the screen with only a face or an object for the purpose of dramatizing nonverbal reactions or signaling the symbolic importance of an object.

*Wide-angle lens*. If a filmmaker wants to emphasize the relationships between foreground and background aspects of a face or object, they will use a wide-angle lens that creates an exaggerated look.

*Telephoto lens*. If a filmmaker wants to give the appearance some a person or object is closer to the audience, even though they may be quite far away, they will use a telephoto lens. This can be used in shots in which a person is running towards the audience, in a manner that seems like a long time.

*Low angle shot*. If a filmmaker wants to place the audience as looking up on a person or object, they use a low angle shot, often for the purpose of associating power with the person or object.

*High-angle shot*. In contrast, a shot down on the person or object places the audience in a dominant position over that person or object.

*Pan shot.* A pan shot is used to move or scan across a locale.

*Tracking shot*. A tracking shot is used to following a moving person or object; the camera itself is moving, on a dolly or moving car.

*Zoom shot*. A zoom shot is used to focus in on or to move back from a person or object.

*Point-of-view shot*. A point-of-view shot is designed to mimic the perspective of a person so that the audience is experiencing the world through the eyes of the person.

British Film Institute. (2002). *Introduction to film language*. [CD Rom]. London: British Film Institute.

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/resources/teaching/secondary/filmlanguage/>

Glossaries of film terms,

<http://homepage.newschool.edu/~schlemoj/film_courses/glossary_of_film_terms/glossary_index.html>

<http://www.duke.edu/web/film/Filmterm.htm>

<http://www.allmovie.com/avg_glossary.html>

<http://www.mediaed.org.uk/posted_documents/Filmterms.html>

Cyber Film School

<http://www.cyberfilmschool.com/>

BBC: Video production skills:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/videonation/filmingskills/>

Director in the Classroom: lots of links to video production resources

<http://www.thedirectorintheclassroom.com/resources.php>

lots of links to film technique resources

<http://www.knowledgehound.com/topics/film.htm>

### Lighting

Lighting is another important element. Lighting is used to convey certain meanings through emphasizing or highlighting certain aspects of people or objects, or through uses of different colors, based on the following techniques:

*Low-key lighting*. Low-key lighting is employed in detective, mystery, gangster, or horror films to emphasize contrasts between light and dark images to emphasize the shadowy, dark worlds of these genres.

*High-key lighting*. High-key lighting employs a lot of bright lights with little variation of dark and light; often found in traditional comedies.

*Backlighting*. Backlighting involves placing the light behind the person or object to create an halo effect.

*Colored lenses*. Different colored lens are also used to set the mood in a film based on certain semiotic or archetypal meanings for colors. Red or yellow can be used to create a sense of warmth while a bluish color creates a sense of coldness. In *Minority Report*, the faces of the characters who could predict future events were shown as ultra-white to create a sub-human image.

Examples of hard and soft lighting <http://www.cybercollege.com/tvp027.htm>

Abie Lane Benítez-QuinonesLuz: Poetry and the Physics of Light

Yale/New Haven

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/curriculum/units/2003/4/03.04.01.x.html>

### Using Film Techniques to Convey Cinematic Meanings

As previously noted, you want students be able to go beyond simply identifying instances of these different techniques in films to understanding purposes for using these techniques as tools to achieve certain cinematic purposes. Formulating purposes for uses of techniques requires them to consider what techniques are most appropriate for achieving certain intended responses from audiences based on certain conventions of cinema, as well as certain semiotic meanings.

Central to defining purpose is the idea of where and how does a certain shot position or place an audience relative to the person or object. For example, if students are creating their own video and want to portray a character as alone and desolate, they may employ a long shot showing a character in the middle of a large, expansive field or area in which the surrounding field or area is highlighted as overwhelming the relatively small, insignificant person. This places the audience at a distance from the person, creating a similar sense of being isolated from that person, just as the person is isolated in the larger frame of the long shot. Or, if they want to portray a character as continually suspicious about impeding dangers, they may employ subjective shots in which the person is warily scanning the landscape out of the fear of potential threats. This places the audience in the person’s mindset, inviting the audience to empathize with the person’s concern or fear and the need to continually be on the lookout for potential threats.

Editing

Another important aspect of film technique is editing—how individual shots are combined in sequence to convey certain meanings. The relationships between shots themselves convey certain meanings.

Editing also serves to portray lived time in terms of film-time so that actual events that would take longer to occur in real time are truncated or reduced to fit into the film time of the typical two- hour film. One of the early American filmmakers, D. W. Griffith, employed cross-cutting between two different events in different locales or setting to give the impression that the two events are related. Or, filmmakers with insert cut-away shots of audience reactions to an event to slow down real time. Thus, a horserace that would take five minutes in real time might actually take ten minutes in film time when audience reactions are included.

During the 1940s and 1950s filmmakers such as Orson Welles, particularly in *Citizen Kane*, employed what is known as deep-focus shots. Rather than using cuts between different shot, he juxtaposed persons or objects within the same scene, creating a tension between foreground and background images. For example, in *Citizen Kane*, the parents are shown in the background signing documents that relinquishes their legal rights to their son as he is playing outside in the foreground, unaware of what is happening to him.

descriptions of techniques employed in key scenes in *Citizen Kane*

<http://www.users.muohio.edu/shermalw/honors_2001_fall/honors_papers_2001/kane/>

During the 1950s and 1960s, filmmakers such as Alfred Hitchcock, and later, Martin Scorsese, carefully planned out each shot with elaborate scripts and storyboards (Scorsese used a computer) that was designed to create dramatic effects. For example, a famous scene of Cary Grant in Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* being lured to an Illinois cornfield only to be attacked by a low-flying dust-cropper plane (for a storyboard, see Giannetti, 2004) demonstrates the deliberate juxtaposition of shots of Grant’s face and escape movements with shots of the plane as it makes another turn to swoop down on Grant.

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0053125/trailers>

Then, in the 1960s, filmmakers of the French New Wave such as Jean-Luc Godard, Francis Truffaut, and Claude Chabrol, experimented with different forms of editing. Godard challenged traditional notions of editing through uses of jump-cuts.

In the 1990s, a group of Scandinavian filmmakers associated with the “Dogma” school began developing a new style of filmmaking that is based on the following 8 principles:

1. All shooting must take place on the original set.
2. The sound may not be produced independently of the image.
3. Only handheld cameras are to be used.
4. Special lighting for color sets is forbidden.
5. Optical gimmicks must be refused.
6. Any gratuitous action is to be rejected.
7. The films must take place in the here and now.
8. Genre films should be avoided.

Some films that followed these principles are *Breaking the Waves*, *Idioteren* (*The Idiots*),

*Festen* (*The Celebration*), and *Dogville*.

<http://www.uca.edu/org/ccsmi/jounal2/ESSAY_Wuss.htm>

<http://www.flickerings.com/2003/films/dogma.html>

Filmmakers may also create a sense of suspense or drama through the use of quick shots, with cuts every 2 or 3 seconds. Or, in contrast, they may slow down time to create a dream-like mood by employ long takes with few cuts. Given the quick-cutting that began to occur in television ads in the 1980s, films since then are more likely to mimic the fast-cut pace of advertising.

Filmmakers also convey the meaning of relationships between shot through uses of different types of transition between shots. They may employ a smooth, slow dissolve from one image to another or fade an image in or out in ways that imply continuity between shots. They may also suddenly cut between shots or employ a wipe between shots to call attention to the switch in scenes or to even create a jarring sensation.

For examples of different editing techniques

<http://www.actf.com.au/learning_centre_new/LearnAbout/Film_Production/LiveAction/editing/editing.htm>

*Teaching editing through doing editing*. One of the best ways to teach editing is to have students engaged in their own editing using IMovieTM <http://www.apple.com/imovie/>

or other editing software programs such as Adobe Premier and After Effects, for both Macintosh and Windows, and Final Cut Pro, for Macintosh. In using these programs, students must think about how and why they making certain editing decisions. They can readily take clips of video and consider alternative ways to sequence the clips to most effectively develop a narrative or a documentary.

Once students have important material into computers from their camcorders, they then select the material they want to use and import it into IMovie. They then name or rename the different clips using the box below each small picture. They then can insert the clips into the horizontal bar on the bottom of the screen. They can then rearrange the clips, crop them, and add sound. They can also add fades, wipes, or dissolves between shots.

For more specifics, seeTom Barrance on creating IMovies

<http://mediaed.org.uk/posted_documents/imoviestart.html>

In thinking about editing, students are learning skills that should transfer over to revising drafts in writing, revision that requires them to thinking about organization of material in ways that engage or persuade audiences. For example, middle school students at Lincoln Magnet School, in Springfield, Illinois, in a course on Video Journalism taught by Toni McDowell, made documentaries about people in the community whom they perceived to be “heroes.” They then conduct video interviews these people as well as people who were influenced by these peoples’ actions. They then edit their material, include other material and music, to create a documentary.

<http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/ali/exhibits/1000471/The_Lesson.html>

Or, 11th graders writing in Adam Kinory’s English class in The School of the Future in Manhattan conducted an analysis of motifs in the film, *Inherit the Wind*, about the Scopes Trial. As they viewed the film, students recorded instances of these motifs, as well as making certain textual connections:

1. Text to Text--*This reminds me of something in another book, film or media.*

2. Inter-Text--*This reminds me of something in this book, film, or media.*

3. Text to Self--*This reminds me of something in my own life*

4. Text to World--*This reminds me of something in the world*

Adam took the students’ analysis of patterns and digitized the 30 most-noted clips in the film. After viewing each of these clips, the students wrote and then discussed the significance of the clip related to the film’s themes. He then had students select 3 clips that were thematically related, leading up to formulating a thematic interpretation and to write about that theme. This represents the use of different clips related to learning to define relationships between different parts of a film.

<http://ali.apple.com/ali_sites/deli/exhibits/1000751/The_Lesson.html>

PBS Listen Up! Youth video production site

<http://www.pbs.org/merrow/listenup/>

Pier Marton, Washington University,Video Production

<http://artsci.wustl.edu/~marton/VideoPrd.html>

For further reading:

Dancyger, K. (2002). *Technique of film and video editing: History, theory, and practice.* New

York: Focal Press.

Kenny, R. (2001). *Teaching TV production in a digital world: Integrating media literacy*

(Student edition). Denver, CO**:** Libraries Unlimited

Contact Us

### Sound

Another important film technique is the use of sound. Sound is related to editing in that sound provides continuity across different shots. A filmmaker may use the same music across different shots to imply that these shots are connected. Sound effects can also be used to create continuity as with the repetition of an actor’s cough in the background to signal his presence.

The musical score for a film is used to add additional meanings. To add to a fast-paced chase scene, a filmmaker may employ a fast-paced score. To add to a slow, romantic scene, a filmmaker may employ romantic violin music. To introduce certain ideas into the film, a filmmaker may add familiar songs that serve as commentary on the events in the film. the picture from that scene.

For examples of different uses of sound:

<http://www.actf.com.au/learning_centre_new/LearnAbout/Film_Production/LiveAction/sound/sound.htm>

Film Sound Theory

<http://hem.passagen.se/filmljud/filmsound.htm>

Film Sound Design

<http://www.filmsound.org/>

Film Sound History

<http://www.mtsu.edu/~smpte/timeline.html>

Film Sound Glossary

<http://www.dolby.com/movies/dfsglos.html>

Lots of links on film sound

<http://www.birka.fhsk.se/sven/links.htm>

Bela Balazs: Theory of the Film: Sound

<http://lavender.fortunecity.com/hawkslane/575/theory-of-film.htm>

Webquest: analysis of soundtrack for 1968 Romeo and Juliet

<http://www.msad54.k12.me.us/MSAD54Pages/skow/CurrProjects/romeojulietsound/romeojulietq2.htm>

For further reading:

Davis, R. (2000). *Complete guide to film scoring: The art and business of writing music for*

*movies and TV*. New York: Berklee Press.

Rona, J. (2001). *The reel world: Scoring for pictures*. New York: Backbeat Books.

### Defining Purposes for Editing Decisions: Creating Storyboards

Just as students define purposes for selecting certain techniques, they also need to consider purposes for editing decisions regarding the length of shots and scenes, relationships between shots and scenes, and linking sound and music to the action. In creating their own videos, they may formulate these decisions prior to shooting through a storyboard, so that they know that they will have the material they need for editing. This include what is known as “master shots”—shots of the overall action or people together in the same shot, as well as separate close up or mid shots of the same action so that they can combing this material together to create a variety of different perspectives on the action.

A storyboard is a visual, drawn rendition of different key shots in a film. Asking students to create a storyboard requires them to envision how they would use certain techniques to convey certain meanings. In working with students, it is important that they focus on creating storyboards for only a short segment of film. They could select a couple of scenes from a short story or novel, or create a television commercial or public relations ad.

*Scripts*. Prior to creating a storyboard, students first need to construct a script. (A full-length film would be based on a screenplay). A script outlines the key events or scenes in film, specifying actions, dialogue, sound effects, and music. In creating a script based on a literary text, students need to consider how they can translate characters’ actions, dialogue, or thoughts into a visual form that conveys the ideas they want to convey.

Filmmaking 101: Writing a Script

<http://library.thinkquest.org/29285/filmmaking/st1.html>

Published screenplays of current films

<http://www.scriptbuddy.com/published/>

Interactive Simulation: creating a script

<http://library.thinkquest.org/10015/data/interact/sim/>

Scriptware: scriptwriting software: free demo

<http://www.scriptware.com/>

Sriptwriting shareware, ScreenForge

<http://www.execpc.com/~jesser/ScreenForgeInfo.html>

Sriptwriting shareware, ScreenPro 97 2.0a

<http://members.aol.com/jackwpass/aspire.html>

Drew’s Script-o-rama

<http://www.script-o-rama.com/>

*Storyboards*. Students then take the script and create a storyboard. You can provide them with sheets with empty boxes that they use to fill in material. You need to stress to students that they should not be concerned about creating highly artistic material. Students could also study comics for ideas about uses of techniques; they could also create a storyboard based on an actual film segment.

To download free storyboard software go to this site:

<http://www.atomiclearning.com/storyboardpro>

For additional resources: <http://accad.osu.edu/womenandtech/Storyboard%20Resource/>

For step-by-step directions to create a storyboard using MS Word:

<http://digitalstorytelling.coe.uh.edu/pdfs/inword.pdf>

On-line samples of storyboards:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~movieboards/fortonboard1.html>

Webquest: Film Production: deals with all aspects of making a film

<http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/webfilmpropa.html>

View the process of making a student film, Fat Man and Little Boys

<http://library.thinkquest.org/10015/data/bts/>

*Ideological stance and technique*. Students also need to realize that different techniques are employed to achieve different ideological goals reflecting different stances adopted by filmmakers towards their subject matter and audience. In a unit on stance and documentary filmmaking, Norina Beck, an art teacher at Crosswinds Middle School, in Woodbury, MN, employs video production to help students understand the relationship between stance and their production techniques, stances of being an advocate, observer, or poet

*Concepts for Understanding*

1. Film makers take different positions in relation to their subject matter, a film maker may be an advocate; interested in advancing a cause, an observer; interested in reflecting reality as accurately as possible, or a poet; interested in finding the beauty behind a story and enriching it with visual metaphors.

2. The way film makers make use of camera shots, angles, cuts, editing, audio, and special effects influences the viewers’ interpretation of an event or story to present a particular point of view.

3. Films are carefully and deliberately constructed in the pre-production period

4. Film makers work cooperatively with members of their production team to develop and implement their ideas.

*Documentary Styles and Point of View*

Students will view sequences from three different styles of documentary that focus their attention on a particular community. These three documentary stances will be discussed in relation to the others and analyzed for their content and technique.

*Documentor as Advocate*: The Advocate Perspective takes advantage of the sensual allure of film to sell a particular position. Films in this genre use editing to select specific parts of a story that best represent the film-makers or producers stance.

- *Triumph of the Will* 1934, Leni Reifenstahl- Germany. This film is a blatant example of government sponsored propaganda. The film portrays Hitler as a demi-god, admired by thousands and in control of massive military and political power. The film was thought to have been responsible for gathering thousands of supporters and intimidating global powers with its portrayal of Hitler as a savior of the German people.

- *Land Without Bread* 1932, Luis Bunuel- Spain. This film describes in sardonic detail the life of a small Spanish town nestled in the mountains- and the misfortunes the common villagers have faced due to modernization, disease, and poverty. This film has a relies on a disturbing them/us dichotomy blaming the villagers for their wretched situation.

*- The Filmore* 1990, Kevin Jamison,- Unites States. This film is one in a documentary series about the history of San Francisco neighborhoods- Filmore began as a primarily Japanese neighborhood- after most of its residents were forced to move to internment camps during W.W.II- it became a prosperous African American neighborhood- A city planning community leveled the neighborhood again in the 70's forcing its residents out to build new high rise apartments that none of the former residents could afford.

*Stylistic/ technical characteristics:* voice over guided narration outside looking in- Point of View Bad guys/Good Guys use of camera angles to guide viewer's perspective characterized by a dramatization of an event

*Documentor as Observer:* The Observer subgenre was developed in reaction to the advocate films. These film makers use minimal editing and long shots to try and present a series of events as they actually happened.

- *Warrendale* 1967 Allen King- United States. This documentary was filmed at a home for disturbed children- and details the affects of the death of a much-loved cook on the troubled young.

- *American Dream* 1972, Barbara Kopple- United States. This documentary tells the story of a small town workers union who strikes dramatic pay cuts at the Hormel meat packing plant. Seen through the eyes of its workers Kopple sharply describes the position of labor against the tyranny of money making corporations.

*Decline of Western Civilization II* 1999, Penelope Spheeris- United States. This is a great community film for teen audiences- it explores communities of teenage "gutter punks" in the early 90's. Their story is one of homelessness- squatting- drugs and punk rock. It is a depressingly realistic look at a destructive and lonely community.

*Home Movie* 2000, Chris Smith- United States. This documentary focuses on five different families in America and the eccentric and personal ways they have created homes for themselves. Humorous and diverse, this film explores our strong ties to home- and the creative lengths to which we will go to make a place for ourselves.

*Stylistic/ technical characteristics:* audio primarily interview based steady camera shots minimal editing/ camera manipulation Match frame editing- to emphasize real time sequences interested in "Conveying their feel in terms of people" (Karel Reisz)

*Documentor as Poet*: In every artistic medium there is a group of artists who love the medium. In film these film makers are very interested in beauty, spcial effects, and the ambiance of their films. These films read as a short ode- and use a visualy delightful language.

- *Rain (Regen)* 1929, Joris Ivens –Netherlands. A lyrical view of Amsterdam through the lens of rain. This film describes a single rainstorms affect on a city. Ivens uses an impressionistic/ painterly language to sketch a beautiful cityscape and reveal the lives of the people who live in it.

- *Hands and Threads (Ruke I Niti)* 1964- Mica Milosevic – Yugoslavia. The film

shows in fascinating detail the activity of a rug-weaving shop. The viewer is mesmerized by the rhythmic action of the shuttles and the quiet concentration of the young women at work. When this is synchronized with harp music- we get the impression that the weavers are producing celestial music.

*- Juan I Can't Remember* 1999, Juan Carlos Rulfo –Mexico. This film explores themes of old age and loss by focusing its attention on a small elderly community in rural Mexico. I particularly love this documentary for its stylistic qualities. The film-maker combines time lapsed scenes from nature with stories about the lives of his subjects to create a very powerful and evocative story about old age and death.

*Stylistic/ technical characteristics*: interested in contemplating themes through the lens of beauty rhythmic editing carefully composed shots montage editing special effects/ video overlay music added as an emotional element dissolves/ smooth transitions wonder in contemplating nature

Lesson Sequence:

1.Students will be introduced to these three different documentary stances and given a little introduction to each before viewing segments of the aforementioned films. Students will use a viewer guide to record their interpretations about the different technical characteristics of these films-drawing on their knowledge of camera shots/ angles/ and editing techniques.

2. Students will share their observations- and the teacher will add additional qualities that are overlooked to a list on the board.

3. After each subgenre has been analyzed- the instructor will lead students in a comparison between the three- and ask students questions about the filmmakers’ distinct priorities and interests.

4. The instructor will guide students into the studio part of the lesson by explaining that they are going to take a particular stance in their final documentaries.

5. The class will brainstorm ideas for community topics in or around the school.

6. Students will break up into production teams and begin writing a treatment of their teams chosen idea- this treatment should pay particular attention to the groups chosen stance (Advocate, Observer, Poet) when planning audio/ sequencing/ and camera style.

7. After completing a treatment production groups will meet with their instructor for an in progress critique. Students will modify their ideas via instructor and peer feedback.

8. The instructor will demonstrate the process of expanding a treatment , gathering photos and constructing a storyboard.

9. Students will expand their idea from a treatment to a photo-storyboard. Using a digital camera, students will collect sample images representing shots in their film. These shots will be arranged and rearranged until a coherent sequence has been created- followed by an in progress critique with instructor.

For further reading:

Begleiter, M. (2001). *From word to image: Storyboarding and the filmmaking process.* New

York: Michael Wiese.

Fraioli, J. O. (2000). *Storyboarding 101: A crash course in professional storyboarding.* New

York: Michael Wiese.

Katz, S. (1991). *Film directing shot by shot: Visualizing from concept to screen.* New York:

Michael Wiese.

Pope, T. (1998). *Good scripts, bad scripts: Learning the craft of screenwriting through 25 of the best and worst films in history*. Pittsburgh: Three Rivers Press.

Simon, M. (2000). *Storyboards: Motion in art*, 2nd Ed. New York: Focal Press.

**Analysis/Evaluation of Film Technique**

As students are learning about different aspects of film technique, they are also analyzing the use and effectiveness of film techniques in films. They could bring in video clips and share their analyses with a class, describing their perceptions of the techniques employed. Or, they could find on-line trailers or video clips and share analyses using the whiteboard feature in tappedin.org by posting the URL for the trailer or video clip. Again, in sharing their analyses, they need to be able to not only identify the types of techniques employed, but to also describe the purposes for using these techniques.

Links related to film technique:

<http://pblmm.k12.ca.us/TechHelp/VideoHelp/VideoGuide.html>

<http://homepages.unl.ac.uk/sofia/camera/index.html>

<http://www.exposure.co.uk/eejit/lingo/index.html>

<http://www.MediaEd.org.uk>

Annenberg: How Are Films Made?

<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/cinema/index.html>

CineMedia: links to over 16,000 film sites

<http://afi.cinemedia.org/welcomes/you.html>

Sofia: Study of Film as Internet Application

<http://www.imperica.com/index.php?option=articles&task=viewarticle&artid=55&Itemid=3>

Using the Web to teach film and film theory

# Film History

Another basic approach to studying film technique is to analyze changes in the uses of technique from an historical perspective, focusing on the ways in which innovations in film, video, and digital technology resulted in new types of techniques over the past one-hundred years. Each new technology break-through resulted in a experimentation and acceptance of new uses of techniques.

History of the development of the movie camera from the National Museum of Photography, Film, and Television <http://www.nmpft.org.uk/insight/onexhib_cin.asp>

One of the central developments in film history was the “silent movie” era featuring major figures such as D. W. Griffith,

<http://www.historychannel.com/perl/print_book.pl?ID=35186>

Charlie Chaplin,

<http://www.historychannel.com/perl/print_book.pl?ID=34884>

and Cecil B. DeMille

<http://www.historychannel.com/perl/print_book.pl?ID=34976>

The fact that the story and character development needed to be conveyed through non-verbal means required high-quality acting and uses of black-and-white images. The early silent Charlie Chaplin films, for example, relied on Chaplin’s physical dexterity and nonverbal skills. However, it is also important to recognize the Chaplin was conveying certain important political and ideological perspectives related to the importance of valuing the democratic ideal of the power of the ordinary person against the impersonal forces of business/bureaucracy. In his later films, *Modern Times* (1936) and *The Great Dictator* (1940), he more explicitly addressed political issues of government control and Nazism. In his later years, as he grew more critical of certain aspects of American capitalism, he was barred from re-entering America during the McCarthy era of the 1950s.

<http://wso.williams.edu/~dgerstei/chaplin/intro.html>

<http://www.cc.jyu.fi/~jopa/chaplin/>

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/chaplin_c.html>

One of the most important episodes in film history was the introduction of sound in the 1920s. The addition of sound resulted in a major shift in films that focused more on drama (often highly staged and the musical genre). This led to the rise of the Hollywood studio production system in the 1930s in which drama films could be readily produced quickly in an assembly-line manner for showing at the increasing number of local movie theaters. The studio system also resulted in the rise of certain directors who established their own unique styles despite the assembly-line process: John Ford, Frank Capra, Michael Curtiz, and later, Orson Welles and Alfred Hitchcock. It also resulted in the rise of the “movie star” around whom films were often developed. This was particularly important for actresses such as Bette Davis, Marlene Dietrich, Greta Garbo, Claudette Clobert, Barbara Stanwyck, Carole Lombard, and Katharine Hepburn, who represented the image of the new outspoken, “independent” female in American culture.

After World War II, the rise of television had a negative impact on the film industry, as audiences no longer went to the movie theaters as they did in the 1930s and 1940s. During the 1960s and early 1970s the industry reacted by creating films with innovative, novel, highly realistic material that would not be suitable for network television, leading to what is referred to as the “golden age” of American films epitomized by *Godfather I and II*. However, as studio profits began to decline, they were purchased by large conglomerates who were more concerned with profits for their companies. This led to the increasing focus in the 1980s to producing safe, predictable genre blockbuster films that would lead to large profits for the studio’s owners.

At the same time, European, Japanese, Chinese, Iranian, and Austrialian films were becoming increasingly more important in terms of their artistic quality and innovation. However, many of the films received only limited distribution through “art” movie theaters, so they were less accessible than Hollywood films. The French “New Wave” filmmakers—Godard, Chabrol, and Truffaut,

<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/Stephen_Nottingham/cintxt2.htm>

as well as Federico Fellini in Italy in *La Strada, La Dolce Vita, Juliet of the Spirits, Satyricon*, and *Amarcord*,

<http://www.1worldfilms.com/federico_fellini.htm>

and Luis Bunuel in Spain in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie, The Milky Way, Belle De Jour, Diary of a Chambermaid*, and *The Exterminating Angel*,

<http://www.filmref.com/directors/dirpages/bunuel.html>

<http://www.wayney.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/bunuel.htm>

were experimenting with alternative ways of portraying characters’ subjectivity and critical perspectives on a conformist society.

The development of VHS and Beta video tapes in the 1970s resulted in a major shift in viewing habits in that films that may not have been successful in theaters or that audiences missed could now be viewed at a later date. Moreover, film teachers could now easily focus on specific clips or review parts of a film in classrooms. The rise of DVD productions in the 1990s only further enhanced film study in that additional materials, out-takes, director interviews, historical background, etc., included on DVDs could be examined.

The 1990s also ushered in the increasing use of special effects and digital technology, with feature films being made increasingly using digital cameras. This allows for easier use of editing in the computer as well as instant distribution on the Internet. Once movie theaters have invested in digital projectors, the costs of distribution will be reduced from having to ship bulky 35mm films. And, as the quality of home viewing on HDTV improves and becomes more affordable, the distinctions between movie and home theaters will blur.

However, the 1990s also witnessed increased control of media conglomerates over the content, promotion, and distribution of films, resulting in the creation of an increasingly important independent film industry outside of the Hollywood studio system.

Tim Dirks: Film History: organized by each year since 1902

<http://www.filmsite.org/filmh.html>

Robert E. Yahnke, Cinema History: one chapter for each decade

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~yahnk001/film/cinema.htm>

Paul Burns: The Complete History of the Discover of Cinematography,

<http://www.precinemahistory.net/>

Bill Douglas Centre for the History of Cinema and Popular Culture

<http://www.ex.ac.uk/bill.douglas/>

The History Channel: summary of film history, with links to directors

<http://www.historychannel.com/perl/print_book.pl?ID=102394>

Orson Welles

<http://www.historychannel.com/perl/print_book.pl?ID=120063>

For further reading:

Cook, D.A. (1996). *A history of narrative film*. New York: W.W. Norton.

Giannetti, L, & Eyman, S. (2000). *Flashback: A brief history of film*, 4th ed.

Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Gomery, D. (1991). *Movie history: A survey.* New York: Wadsworth.

Mast, G., & Kawin, B. F. (2002). *A Short History of the Movies.* New York: Pearson Longman

Thompson, K, & Bordwell, D. (2002). *Film History: An Introduction.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Sklar, R. (2002). *A world history of film.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Sklar, R. (1994). *Movie-Made America: A cultural history of American movies*.

New York: Vintage.

###### Television History

Changes in the development of television technology have also played an important role in influencing films as well as television itself. The whole concept of “live television” in the early years of television resulted in often high-quality productions because performers such as Jack Parr, Milton Berle, Arthur Godfrey, Jack Benny, and others needed to be able to ad lib their performances to live audiences. With the advent of color television in the 1950s and 60s, as well as the increasing popularity of television, television posed a major threat to the Hollywood film industry, forcing the film industry to develop new techniques such as wider screens and higher quality film stock and sound.

The rise of the “made for television” movie also resulted in changes in how films were made for television. Because the screen size for television is smaller, directors had to made sure that actors were placed closer to each other within the frame. (One reason the films for the wide screen often do not work well on television is that material on the wide ends of the frame is often omitted.) They also often organized the narrative sequence knowing that there would be breaks for commercials.

As video cameras became lighter and smaller, news journalists were able to readily access and capture news events more readily than in the past. This resulted in the portrayals of battle scenes and dying soldiers in the Vietnam War, often referred to the as the first “television war,” something that had a strong influence on public opinion about the war. As Marshall McLuhan noted in a famous quote, "Television brought the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room. Vietnam was lost in the living rooms of America--not on the battlefields of Vietnam."

Links on the media and the Vietnam War

<http://www.vietnamwar.net/media/media.htm>

PBS: The American Experience: Vietnam

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/vietnam/>

During the 1970s, the success of prime-time soap opera drama shows such as *Dallas*

<http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dallas_(television>)

established the pattern of the weekly serial format. This led to more stylized, realistic shows such as *Hill Street Blues* <http://www.museum.tv/archives/etv/H/htmlH/hillstreetb/hillstreetb.htm>

in the 1980s that employed a more documentary approach and treatment of everyday urban issues. This paved the way for shows such as *Homicide: Life on the Street*

<http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Bungalow/1350/>

<http://members.aol.com/hlotslinks/>

directed by movie-maker, Barry Levinson, who employed a lot of innovative camera techniques and editing, including the continually-moving tracking camera that become commonly used in programs such as *ER, Chicago Hope*, and *The West Wing.*  The more realistic focus on the larger context of crime in Homicide also paved the way for programs such as *Law and Order*.

Television content also started to slowly become more diverse. *The Cosby Show* in the 1980s portrayed a middle-class African-American family, although some critics charge that it served to only reify anti-welfare attitudes regarding the value of “hard work.” Programs such as *Roseanne* and *The East Enders* in the 1990s portrayed somewhat more realistic perspectives on the life of low-income families. And, in the 1990s, PBS introduced one of the first Hispanic drama programs, *American Family.* However, despite the fact that there are 36.2 million Hispanics in America (2000 census), there remains little programming with Hispanic actors or actresses, or about themes and experiences of interest to Hispanic audiences.

<http://www.current.org/audience/aud0303latino.html>

The 1980s and 1990s witnessed the rise of cable networks that served as a challenge to the control of ABC, NBC, and CBS over both prime-time drama shows and news broadcasts. The Fox Network introduced *The Simpsons* and *Beavis and Butthead* geared for an adolescent audience. CNN introduced the 24-hour news format as well as non-stop coverage of media events such as the O. J. Simpson trial or the death of Princess Diana. HBO, which was not restricted by censorship control of sponsors, introduced realist programming such *The Sopranos*.

Television History sites

<http://www.rtvf.unt.edu/links/histsites.htm>

Television History Archive, Center for Study of Popular Television, Syracuse University

<http://libwww.syr.edu/information/media/archive/main.htm>

Television History

<http://www.tvhistory.tv/>

The History of Television

<http://histv2.free.fr/cadrehistory.htm>

Museum of Television and Radio

<http://www.mtr.org/>

The Museum of Television, Toronto

<http://www.mztv.com/gallery.html>

For further reading:

Bonner, F. (2003). *Ordinary television: Analyzing popular TV*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Castleman, H., & Podrazik, W. J. (2003). *Watching TV: Six decades of American television*.

Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.

Edgerton, G.R., & Rollins, P. (Eds.). (2003). *Television histories: Shaping collective memory in*

*the media age*. Lexington, KT: University of Kentucky Press.

Hilmes, M., & Jacobs, J. (Eds.). (2003). *The television history book*. London: British Film

Institute.

Newcomb, H. (Ed.). (2000). *Television: The critical view*. New York: Oxford University Press.

### Accessing On-line Films/Film Reviews/Ratings/Information

In working with films, there are a lot of useful on-line resources that provide students with on-line clips—largely in the form of trailers—as well as summaries of film reviews, and further information about individual films. One of the most important of these resources is The Internet Movie Base

<http://www.imdb.com/>

This site consists of a database of 260,000 film and television productions, including information about directors, filming locations, awards, and trailers, as well as the directors, actors, actresses, cinematographers, and producers involved in making films. In also includes a Photo Galleries Section with movie stills and celebrity photos, and more. Films can also be searched in terms of genres. One advantage of the IMDb over other similar sites is that you have choices in terms of viewing on-line trailers. You can choose between Windows Media Player, Real Player, or Quicktime in either 56/28k dial-up or 160k broadband.

For assistance in navigating and using the IMDb site.

<http://www.imdb.com/Help/Classes/Freshman/navigating>

<http://www.imdb.com/Help/Classes/Freshman/searching>

<http://www.imdb.com/Help/Classes/Sophomore/sections>

Another useful site is Rottentomatoes.com which provides ratings for films based on the percentage of positive reviews based on a cross section of largely newspaper and journal film reviewers.

<http://www.rottentomatoes.com>

A similar rating site is ChecktheGrid; users can select the particular reviewers they want to include in their overall ratings:

<http://www.checkthegrid.com>

Another site that builds on viewers own preferred tastes in films is Movielens

<http://movielens.umn.edu/login>

MovieLens uses "collaborative filtering" technology to make recommendations of films based on user ratings of preferred films. The more user ratings that are included in their database, the more valid the predications that a user will or will not enjoy a film.

Critics.com: compiles/combines ratings of 15 critics

<http://www.critics.com/>

Roger Ebert

<http://www.suntimes.com/index/ebert.html>

The”Greatest Films” lists

<http://www.filmsite.org/>

Moviefone

<http://www.moviefone.com/>

Hollywood.com A major site with a lot of trailers, including full-screen trailers

<http://www.hollywood.com/>

Open Directory Project: thousand of links on film:

<http://www.dmoz.org/Arts/Movies/>

Facets: DVD/video catalogue

<http://www.facets.org/asticat>

DVD Reviews

<http://www.dvdreview.com/>

<http://www.dvdcorner.net/>

Shortbuzz, short films on line

<http://www.shortbuzz.com/>

Eveo, a streamed video site

<http://www.eveo.com/>

Atom films, streamed short films and animation

<http://www.atomfilms.com>

<http://www.bijoucafe.com>

<http://www.film.com>

<http://www.ifilm.net>

<http://www.mdfkr.com>

<http://www.newvenue.com>

<http://www.thesync.com>

<http://www.dfilm.com>

<http://www.resfest.com>

<http://www.6161.com>

<http://www.conduitfest.com>

<http://www.onedotzero.com>

<http://www.darklight-filmfestival.com>

<http://movieweb.com/>

**Animation and Special Effects**

Another useful way to introduce students to film techniques is to have them study and then create their own animation videos. One advantage of making animation films is that the filmmaker has control over the material, as opposed to having to portray actual events or people. For example, a student can create an animation by simply moving an object or reshaping a piece of clay and shooting separate stop motion shots to capture the movement of the object.

In a PBS Nova program about animation

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/specialfx2/mcqueen.html>

the animator, Glen McQueen was interviewed about how characters in the film Toy Story are shown to move:

That's the fun part. Woody [from "Toy Story"] has over 200 articulated facial muscles in his face alone. He's got over 700 different controls in his body that let you rotate his arm at the elbow or the wrist, bend and rotate his hat and so forth. We use those animation controls to set poses at different frames. It's called key-frame animation. Twenty-four frames make up one second of film. So if you wanted to have Woody do a double take and look over at somebody, you could set a pose like this at say Frame 10 and set a pose like this at Frame 50. And what the computer would do with a lot of coaxing from an animator is give you all of the in-betweens. And where the animator really comes in is not only creating those poses, but also manipulating the timing.

**NOVA:** What part of a film do you contribute?

**GM:** Each animator is given a series of shots in the film. Every time the camera changes, it's a different shot. Hopefully, they're consecutive shots so you can keep the continuity going from one shot to the next. All the dialogue is pre-recorded before the animators ever get the shots. So we listen to the dialogue again and again. We act it out. We do thumbnail sketches. We videotape ourselves acting it out. Essentially the animator is sort of a mute actor. We have to use someone else's line, but what the body does, how the character moves during that line, how many gestures, what the facial expression is, is entirely up to the animator.

Aside from our own explorations, we also videotape the actors as they read the lines, so that when Kevin Spacey is delivering his line as Harper, the main bad guy in "A Bug's Life," we can see what choices he made. What are his eyebrows doing? What's he doing with his hands? Is he moving his head a lot? Another cool thing is that the director usually asks the actor to read the lines five, six, seven times. And each time it's slightly different. So you can say, I really like the eyebrows in the first take, but he's doing something great with his hands in the third take.

Stop Motion Animation

<http://www.stopmotionanimation.com/>

How to make a movie with digital stills

<http://www.res.com/magazine/howto/article-makeamovie1.html>

Clay Animation Home Page

<http://clay.s5.com/>

Clay animation

<http://www.sfsu.edu/~teachers/workshops/clayanimation/>

<http://www.animateclay.com/>

*Flip animation*. One way to introduce students to the idea of animation is to have them create their own flip animation with a small pad of paper in which they vary an object slightly on each page—as illustrated on the random motion site.

<http://www.randommotion.com/>

*Metamorphosis*. This could then lead to a discussion of the basic concept of metamorphosis in animation—the idea that objects or things can be readily transformed into human form and vise versa. Trees turn into people and people into trees. This coincides with the concept of personification in literature—that animate and inanimate things are continually being compared through figurative language in literature, a process that is given visual form in animation.

*Computer animation*. A major development in film techniques has been the increased use of computer-generated special effects, as employed in films such as *The Lord of the Rings* films

<http://www.lordoftherings.net/> and *The Matrix* and *The Matrix Reloaded* films <http://whatisthematrix.warnerbros.com/>

as well as films such as *Titanic.*

PBS Nova: special effects: used in *Titanic* and other films

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/specialfx2/>

These films has created new high levels of expectations for special effects that blue the distinctions between total animation and human drama films, in which humans can now be transformed into animation-like figures or perform superhuman feats such as seamlessly moving about in space. However, it is also the case that computer-generated images (CGI) may simply be used for its own sake, and not be effectively integrated into a film’s story or character development.

Students can employ computer software programs such as Macromedia’s FlashTM

<http://www.macromedia.com/software/flash/>

to create computer animation.

Transience, excellent Flash animation site <http://www.transience.com.au/>

Hotwired, online animation and tutorial site

<http://hotwired.lycos.com/animation/>

Getting started in Animation

<http://www.exposure.co.uk/eejit/animation/index.html>

3D animation workshop tutorials <http://animation.about.com/arts/animation/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http://www.webreference.com/3d/>

3D Studio Max tutorials

<http://www.3dcafe.com/asp/tut3ds.asp>

Aardman online

<http://www.aardman.com/index.html>

Animation World Network

<http://www.awn.com/>

Animation Library: free on-line GIF images

<http://www.animationlibrary.com/a-l/>

Hanna Barbera cartoons

<http://www.dfcom.freeserve.co.uk/hbw/>

Top animation films

<http://members.tripod.com/mcrae_tony/animation1.htm>

*Studying Disney films and popular animation television programs*. Students could also study examples Disney animation filmsand television animation programs. As noted in the Media Representation Module 5, the Disney animation films employed sophisticated animation techniques to portray the world according to a defined ideological orientation that frequently sanitized or glossed over complex aspects of gender, class, and race.

Disney feature animation films

<http://www.bcdb.com/pages/Walt_Disney_Studios/Feature_Films/>

<http://dir.yahoo.com/Entertainment/Movies_and_Film/Titles/Animation/Disney/>

Original cels employed in Disney films

<http://www.cartoon-factory.com/data/Disney/>

Lots of Disney-film links/clip art

<http://www.disneysites.com/>

One of the most popular of any television programs is *The Simpsons*, which was launched in 1990 and has been appealing to audiences since then.

<http://www.snpp.com/other/papers/ak.paper.html>

Another important television genre is the cartoon program, geared primarily, but not necessarily, for children. Students could critically examine the ways in which cartoon shows represent or portray characters based on gender, race, or class, as well as the portrayal of violence.

Cartoon Network

<http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/>

Fox network cartoon shows

<http://www.foxkids.com/main.html>

Kelly Eick, Gender Stereotypes in Children's Television Cartoons (1998)

<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~jrubba/495/papersS98/paper1.html>

Jim Rutenberg, New York Times, January 28, 2001: “Violence Finds a Niche in Children’s Cartoons”

<http://www.fradical.com/violence_finds_a_niche_in_childrens_cartoons.htm>

For further reading:

Canemaker, J. (1996). *Before the animation begins: The art and lives of*

*Disney inspirational sketch artists*. New York: Hyperion Press.

Hahn, D. (2000). *Animation magic: A behind-the-scenes look at how an*

*animated film is made*. Orlando: Disney Press.

Jenkins, P. (1991). *Animation: How to draw your own flipbooks, and other fun ways to*

*make cartoons move.* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing

Koenig, D., Herman, R. M., & Sherman, R. B. (2001). *Mouse under glass: Secrets*

*of Disney animation and theme parks.* New York: Bonaventure Press.

Laybourne, K. (1979). *The animation book.* New York: Crown Publishers.

Maltin, L. (1990). *Of mice and magic: A history of American animated*

*cartoons*. New York: Plume.

Rickett, R. (2000). *Special effects: The history and techniques*. New

York: Watson-Guptill Press.

Solomon, C. (1994). *The history of animation: Enchanted drawings*. New

York: Outlet Press.

Stabile, C.A., & Harrison, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Prime time animation:*

*Television animation and American culture*. New York: Routledge.

Thomas, F., & Johnston, O. (1995). *The illusion of life: Disney animation*. New

York: Hyperion Press.

# Film Study Methods

While it is important to have students know how to identify the uses of different film techniques, it is also important for students to be able to formulate their responses and critical analysis to the content of films, as well as the quality of the acting, directing, costume design, and casting. Focusing simply on analysis of techniques may result in an academic exercise in which students are intimidated by their lack of knowledge of technique and therefore do not share their response to the viewing experience. It is also important that you create a classroom context in which students are comfortable formulating and sharing their responses.

*Showing films in class*. There is considerable debate about ways of most effectively devoting limited class time to showing films. On the one hand, it is useful that students be able to view a film in its entirety. Moreover, to capture the nature of the film-viewing experience, it may be better not to interrupt viewing of a film to conduct analyses or to point out certain techniques, interruptions that can undermine the experience of becoming caught up in the film world, which Susanne Langer described as the equivalent of being in a dream world in which you forget about your physical surroundings and become totally adsorbed in the film.

On the other hand, you may not have the time to show an entire film, so you may consider the option of simply showing clips that highlight or illustrate certain uses of techniques or for discussion of film content. You may also simply assign students to view films on their own as homework. Showing clips also allows you to conduct analyses in a manner that is not interrupting the overall film experience. You can also show the same clip numerous times to focus on certain aspects of the clip. With one viewing, you can turn off the sound, which allows for more focus on the camera techniques. With another viewing, you can blacken out the screen to focus just on the sound effects and/or music.

*Responding to specific images/sounds*. It is also important to have students learn to initially respond to particular or specific aspects of their viewing, as opposed to global generalizations such as “There was a lot of action.” To help them focus on details, you can employ what is called the “image-sound” skim. After viewing a film or film clip, students can list specific images or sounds. Then, next to these images and sounds, they could describe the types of emotions or feelings evoked by these images or sounds. For example, if they list, “close-up of raised knife in killer’s hand,” they may then list “fear about what will happen.” Students could then share their lists and discuss some of the reasons for the associations between certain images/sounds and certain emotions, associations that may be based on semiotic meanings (see Module 4).

*Fostering discussion*. You are also trying to foster classroom or on-line chat discussion of films in which students learn to not only voice their initial responses, but to also engage in some critical analysis. This involves employing some basic facilitation strategies:

*- Recognizing students as first-time viewers*. You often forget that students are responding to a text for the first time, while you may have viewed and interpreted a film many times. You therefore need to suspend their well-formulated interpretations and empathize with their students’ perspective as novice viewers who are working through their initial reactions and attempts to make sense of a film.

*- Sequencing questions and strategies*. Students often have difficulty quickly formulating an interpretation without first defining their engagement reactions, perceptions, associations, and connections with related experiences or other texts. An essential principle is the notion of “first things first”--that students need to explore their initial responses that serve as a basis for formulating interpretations or generalizations about a text.

*- Employing small-group discussions*. Students may have more opportunities to talk in small groups, assuming that you have structured these groups in a manner that results in productive exchanges. It is important that groups have a specific task and that they report back to the large group so that they have some sense of accountability to the larger group.

Harvey Daniels, *Literature Circles*, on-line book on setting up small-group discussions

<http://www.stenhouse.com/0333.htm>

*- Students formulating their own questions*. It is also important that, as part of inquiry instruction, students formulate their own questions about their experience with a text. Students could list various questions about a text. They then dictate those questions to you and you write them on the board or overhead, possibly grouping them by type or category. The discussion could then revolve around responding to these questions.

*- Reflecting during discussions*. During a discussion, you can create time-out sessions for students to write their reflections on the discussion. At the end of the discussion, students can then write about what they learned from the discussion by synthesizing their perceptions of that discussion as well as list unanswered questions which serve as the basis for future discussions.

*- Monitoring the degree of student interaction*. To monitor your own success in facilitating interaction, keep track of the number of times students are talking to each other. Rather than a “T (teacher) S (student), T S” pattern in which the floor always returns to the teacher for the next question, try to achieve stretches of “T S S S S S S” talk. These student stretches are more likely to occur when

*- Being a participant in a discussion*. In addition to facilitating the discussion, you may also be a participant by contributing your own responses. In doing so, you need to recognize that while you may have read and thought about a text numerous times, your students are reading the text for the first time. In the discussion, in sharing your own responses and posing questions, you’re modeling the uses of different critical approaches and response strategies. For techniques on using response stances in leading discussions, see Langer & Close, 2001.

<http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/conversations/conversation/responding/>

- *Following-up on student responses.* In the context of discussions, you need to recognize how students react to questions so that you can then follow through and help students explore or extend their “uptake” response—something teachers rarely do because they may be more interesting in moving on to the next question. You may ask them to elaborate on or extend their response, with prompts such as “tell me more about that” or “what are some reasons that you think that.” In doing so, you are modeling certain ways of extending thinking which students will hopefully internalize and use to reflect on their own initial ideas.

*- Scaffolding/modeling responses*. In scaffolding students’ responses, you are modeling ways of using various interpretive strategies or critical approaches in a manner that provides some sense of how and why to use these strategies or approaches. For example, if students are having difficulty applying a poststructuralist approach to analyzing the binary nature of essentialist categories such as “male” versus “female” operating in a text, you may model your analysis of how these opposing categories leave out variations within and across gender practices associated with cultural notions of masculinity and femininity.

*- Fostering diversity in discussions*. In leading discussions, you also need to recognize and

foster cultural diversity as well expression of diverse cultural perspectives. This includes helping them appreciate the number of situations that can be understood only by comparing several interpretations, and help them appreciate how one's premises, observations, and interpretations are influenced by social identity and background. It also involves allowing students to voice different, alternative, or non-conventional opinions. This means that you need to discourage students from attempt to suppress or ridicule students who do express alternative, minority perspectives.

*- Recognizing individual differences*. You also need to recognize the range of individual differences in their classroom. Given their passive roles in many classrooms, some students may simply have not had a lot of experience in sharing their responses in front of a group. Or, they may be reluctant to disclose their own private responses. One strategy for bolstering students' confidence in the validity of their own responses involves “think-aloud” activities. In a “think-aloud,” one student makes explicit to another student all of their thoughts as they are viewing a film. Students don’t attempt to reflect on or interpret their thoughts, they simply report on what they are thinking to their partner, who simply provides verbal and nonverbal encouragement to keep going.

Think-aloud prompts

<http://www.learner.org/channel/workshops/conversations/lessonbuilder/thinkaloud.html>

*- Cultural and historical knowledge.* Some students may have extensive background knowledge about the historical or cultural world of a film, while others may have little knowledge, which may influence their understanding and incentive to complete This means that you may Given this variation in background knowledge, teachers may exploit those students with the background knowledge to have them share that knowledge with their peers, a strategy that bolsters these students sense of agency in the classroom.

*- Employing different types of questions*. In leading discussions, you need to be able to employ a wide range of different types of questions. One basic type of question consists of “closed” questions which are not “authentic” in that they presuppose a correct answer. Bill Martin (2000) employs the following questions to foster discussion in his film class:

Question 1. Whom do we like?

We start our discussion by pretending to be part of the narrative audience. We talk about the film as if it is a reality which we can participate in and judge.

Question 2. What don’t we understand?

We clarify and fill-in our personal plot gaps. Why did he go into her room to close the window? Why did she leave the party?

Question 3. What does the title mean? The beginning? The ending?

The beginning counts. Think about what that first image was? Help each other remember. What was the final image? It’s amazing how often we can’t remember the final image of a film. It makes a difference. And the title. It is not (usually) just a label; the title encompasses the whole film. What is this title doing? What can it do?

Question 4. What things are repeated?

Repetitions happen in life and no one notices. But in a film repetitions should be noticed. Repetitions of language, repetitions of actions, repetitions of technique (here technique is more than just terminology to memorize). Why are these things repeated? What effect do they have? How would the film be different if the repetitions were eliminated?

Question 5. What things seem out of place?

Puzzles in the film. Again we don’t want to solve the puzzles. We want to notice them. Question 6. Can we complicate our formulation?

During the final exam discussion, students were not long in coming to a fairly sound reading of the film: The artist needed the anguish of a relationship to bring out his creativity.

Question 7. What values does the film endorse?

Is it endorsing using other people for art? Is it taking the side of these girls as victims? Question 8. What do we think of the endorsement of these values?

It is important to separate our own values from the values of the film, but it is also important to relate these two sets of values.

Question 9. What foregrounded details did we notice? Can these be integrated into our way of understanding the film?

This is a different question from what things seemed out of place. This draws our attention to the close-ups of the brush strokes, the quality of the paint, the vibrancy of the colors the artist uses.

Question 10. What techniques were used?

The airport shots are in slow motion. There are overhead shots of his studio. The final image is an extreme long shot.

Strategies for leading discussions

<http://dmc.umn.edu/strategies/discussion.shtml>

# Writing about Films

In Module 1, you learned about using on-line writing in chat rooms, MOOs, or blogs to foster sharing of responses to films, writing in which students are writing in a social contect (Trupe, 2003). You may also want to employ writing assignments that serve to foster critical responses to film. This includes the use of informal writing tools:

*- Freewriting*. In using freewriting, students write in a nonstop, spontaneous manner for five or ten minutes without premature concern for editing. Essential to freewriting is avoiding the propensity to edit, censor, block, or revise initial reactions to texts. Freewrites can be used help focus students’ thinking on a specific topic or idea in the beginning of class as well as prepare them to verbally sharing responses. For students who are reluctant to verbally share their responses, having something to read can bolster their confidence. As a discussion unfolds, students could take time-out to write their thoughts about or reflections on the discussion topic(s). By writing during the discussion, students can recharge their thinking in order to interject some new ideas into the discussion or push the discussion in new directions. Then, at the end of the discussion, students could write about what they learned from the discussion by synthesizing their perceptions of the discussion. By studying these reflective “learning entries," teachers may determine differences in how students are perceiving their classroom experience.

*- Note-taking/jotting*. In note-taking or jotting, students are recording their reactions and interpretations to texts, presentations, or lectures. Central to effective note-taking/jotting is the ability to summarize one's perceptions of a film in one's own words, as well as adding one’s reflective interpretations. Jim Burke (2002) identifies some of the following types of notes: <http://www.englishcompanion.com/Tools/notemaking.html>

Episodic Notes: identify distinct scenes or moments in the text

Hierarchical Notes: organizing ideas into a hierarchy.

Inference Notes: analyze a fictional character by finding and interpreting quotes by or about the character; then a space at the bottom of the page asks students to make inferences about the character

Plot Notes: graphic organizer designed to be used with fiction [see Burke link on Website]

Reporter's Notes; [use notes to] arrive at a deeper understanding of what they read.

Sensory Notes: use their imagination to help them see what the author is writing, to hear what the language sounds like.

Summary Notes: used while reading a book or article which must then be summarized.

Synthesis Notes: directs students' attention to the crucial aspects of a fictional text.

T-Notes: compare and contrast (books, characters, past and present, etc)

Target Notes: generate/expand as well as narrow/refine depending on the needs of the assignment or task.

To encourage effective note-taking/jotting, you can emphasize the idea of reformulation of the text into their own words, using a prompt such as “formulate your notes in terms of your own perceptions, interpretations, and ideas.”

Note-taking, Virginia Cano

<http://clydesdale.dcs.st-and.ac.uk/hospiweb/lectures/note_tak.shtml>

*- Journal writing*. Students may also use a journal or reading log in which they react to texts (Anson & Beach, 1997). You may help students distinguish between formal essay writing and informal journal writing by sharing examples of journal entries representing more spontaneous, open-ended, exploratory, subjective responses than formal essay writing. You may also want to distinguish between the idea of a journal used in a writing class designed to foster expressive fluency—in which students write about their daily experiences or thoughts—and a “literature” or “reading-log” journal that focuses more on interpreting texts, although the distinction between the two may be somewhat arbitrary.

To encourage effective use of journals, you are emphasizing the idea of open-ended, inquiry-based, exploration of interpretations—that they are using the writing itself to work through their ideas about a text in a highly tentative manner.

Screen Scribes: journal writing about films (includes audience journal responses)

<http://lightfantastic.org/imr/extras/burbs/screenscribes/>

Different types of journals: SCORE

<http://www.sdcoe.k12.ca.us/score/actbank/tjournal.htm>

Journals in the classroom: Diane Walker

<http://7-12educators.about.com/library/weekly/aa083100a.htm?terms=journal>

Gian S. Pagnucci, TechJournals: Electronic Journal Keeping for the Technical Writing Classroom

<http://www.heinemann.com/shared/onlineresources/0453/0453.html>

- *Mapping/diagramming*. Students can use maps or diagrams to chart out and define the relationships between the different aspects of a text. These drawings or diagrams help students perceive their thoughts in visual form, something particularly appealing for those with a high “visual/spatial” intelligence (Gardner, 1993; 2000). Students can use circle maps to portray the different characters circles and then, with spokes emanating from each circle, describe traits, beliefs, and goals associated with each character. (The software applications, *Inspiration*TM or *Storyspace*TM, can be used to create such maps on the computer). Students could also draw maps that represent how they believe characters conceptualize or define their worlds—creating a graphic version of characters’ cultural models of the world—with some practices and beliefs being on the top of the map that they value as “higher,” or more important, than other practices or beliefs.

In formulating writing assignments, you need to consider students’ motivation to write based on specific purposes and audiences. Students can also be motivated to write through writing documents that can serve to inform actual audiences about texts. For example, in a college course on drama, Russell Hunt (2002) had students study the script, author, and production of a particular play that was being produced in a local theater. In the most recent 2003 syllabus for the course, “From the Page to Stage,” taught at St. Thomas University, he specifies the following tasks:

- A group or "task force," responsible for that play, will read the script and write public reflections on their readings (others may do this as well).

- The task force will conduct research on the script, its author, the tradition or context it was written or produced in, previous productions, etc. -- anything we can learn about the play which will help us to understand it better and more fully.

- The group will present the most relevant portion of what it's learned to the rest of the class, normally through an in-class presentation of a Web site, in advance of the opening of the production.

- The rest of the class -- particularly members of two other groups, who will be "designated responders" -- will help the group select from and organize its research findings so that they can be distributed in useful form to the audiences for the production.

- The task force will edit their findings and publish them in a leaflet -- a "playgoer's guide" -- to be distributed to audiences at the theatre.

- They, and other members of the class, will attend the production and write public reflections on the entire experience

Because these guides would be used in these local theaters, students were writing texts for some actual audience.

Russell Hunt’s paper on students’ use of playbill in writing about literature

<http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/p2spaper.htm>

For examples of prompts and students’ playbill writing in Hunt’s 2001 course

<http://www.stthomasu.ca/~hunt/22230001/>

2003 course syllabus

<http://www.stu.ca/~hunt/22230102/2223pt00.htm>

Having students write to and for others also enhances their sense of agency in that they may now be perceived as contributing new ideas or perspectives to the classroom community. For example, you may have different students or teams of students select particular aspects of or critical approaches applied to the same text. Each student or team would then be contributing their one part that serves to contribute to the larger, composite interpretation of a text, contributions that other students may be interested in reading. Students could then use this material to create intertextual or hypertextual links between individual essay contributions that provides a road map for understanding the class’s larger composite interpretation.

The following sites on writing about literature can also apply to writing about films:

Writing about Literature: University of North Carolina Writing Lab

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/literature.html>

Writing Reviews of Literature: University of Wisconsin Writing Center

<http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook/ReviewofLiterature.html>

Writing about Literature: University of Nevada, Las Vegas Writing Center

<http://www.unlv.edu/Colleges/Liberal_Arts/English/Writing_Center/writing_about_literature_to.htm>

Writing Literary Analysis Papers: Seamus Cooney, Western Michigan University

<http://unix.cc.wmich.edu/~cooneys/tchg/lit/adv/lit.papers.html>

PBS Program: Opera of Romeo and Juliet: writing “Dear Abby” letters from characters

<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/education/plan_romeo_procedures.html>

For further reading:

Bishop, E. (Ed.). (1999). *Cinema-(to)-graphy: Film writing in contemporary composition*

*courses*. New York: Teachers College Press.

**Film Study Resources**

Australian Film Institute

<http://www.afi.org.au/>

American Film Institute

<http://www.afi.com/>

The British Film Institute

<http://www.bfi.co.uk>

The Greatest Films

[www.filmsite.org](http://www.filmsite.org)

Film-Media-Resources

[www.film-media-resources.co.uk](http://www.film-media-resources.co.uk)

The Cinema Collection: hundreds of links to different aspects of film study

<http://online.socialchange.net.au/tcc/>

Study of Film as Internet Application (SOFIA)

<http://www.unl.ac.uk/sofia/>

Film.com

<http://www.film.com/>

Filmsite

<http://www.filmsite.org>

Film and television studies

<http://eserver.org/filmtv/>

The film lover's 100

<http://www.film100.com/>

Indie Film Guide

<http://www.live-at.com/reviews/shortbuzz.html>

CHUM: Bravo!'s Scanning The Movies Study Guides

<http://www.chumlimited.com/mediaed/studyguides.asp>

Robert E. Yahnke: Summaries/resources for teaching specific films

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~yahnk001/filmteach/teach.htm>

*Metro Magazine*: study guides to Australian films

<http://www.metromagazine.com.au/metro/frm.htm?highlight=2>

Teach with Movies: ways of integrating movies into the curriculum

<http://www.teachwithmovies.org/>

Jo Flack, Teaching Film as Text

<http://www.labyrinth.net.au/~swinssc/filmas.html>

Ontario Media Literacy: Teaching specific films

<http://www.angelfire.com/ms/MediaLiteracy/Films.html>

University of Iowa Communication Studies: links on film studies

<http://www.uiowa.edu/~commstud/resources/film_resources.html>

Voices of the Shuttle: film studies links

<http://vos.ucsb.edu/browse.asp?id=2720#id917>

National Film Board of Canada

<http://www.nfb.ca/e/index.html>

Director in the Classroom: links to production sites/resources

<http://www.thedirectorintheclassroom.com/resources.php>

On-line digital video sites

<http://www.tcf.ua.edu/ScreenSite/prod/#DV>

Ian Douglas, *Film and Meaning*: on-line book

<http://wwwmcc.murdoch.edu.au/ReadingRoom/Douglas/FRONTMAT.HTM>

##### A secondary teachers' guide to using film and television

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/resources/teaching/secondary/miic/>

Hitchcock: British Film Institute

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/education/resources/teaching/fms/hitchcock/>

Museum of the Moving Image

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/>

### Film Journals/Magazines

*Cinemagazine*

<http://www.cinemazine.com/engels/voorblad/contents.html>

*Cineaste*

<http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/MRC/CineasteMenu.html>

*Senses of Cinema*

<http://www.sensesofcinema.com/>

*Images: Journal of Film and Popular Culture*

<http://www.imagesjournal.com/index.html>

*Film Quarterly*

<http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/fq/>

*Jump Cut: a Review of Contemporary Cinema*

<http://www/ejumpcut.org>

*POST SCRIPT: Essays in Film and the Humanities*

<http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/coas/litlang/PostScript.htm>

*Screen*

<http://www.oup.co.uk/jnls/list/screen>

*Literature Film Quarterly*

<http://www.salisbury.edu/LFQ/default.htm>

*Sight and Sound*

<http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/>

*Film Comment*

<http://www.filmlinc.com/fcm/fcm.htm>

*Bright Lights Film Journal*

<http://www.brightlightsfilm.com>

*Cinema Journal*

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/cj/>

*Kinema*

<http://www.kinema.uwaterloo.ca/>

*Scope: An On-line Journal of Film Studies*

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/film/journal/index.htm>

*Wide Angle*

<http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/wide_angle/>

*Film & History*

<http://www.h-net.org/~filmhis/>

*Cinema Scope*

<http://www.cinema-scope.com/>

*Film International*

<http://www.filmint.nu/eng.html>

*The Film Journal*

<http://www.thefilmjournal.com/>

*Flicker*

<http://www.hi-beam.net/cgi-bin/flicker.pl>

*Framework*

<http://www.frameworkonline.com/>

*Kinoeye: New Perspectives on European Film*

<http://www.kinoeye.org/index_03_09.php>

Offscreen

<http://www.horschamp.qc.ca/offscreen/>

*Reverse Shot Online*

<http://www.reverseshot.com/index.html>

*Talking Pictures*

<http://www.talkingpix.co.uk/>

*Essential Cinema: Journal of Independent Film*

<http://www.kulture-void.com/ecg/contents.html>

*Millennium Film Journal*

<http://mfj-online.org/>

*MovieMaker Magazine*

<http://www.moviemaker.com/>

*Canadian Journal of Film Studies*

<http://www.film.queensu.ca/FSAC/CJFS.html#Top>

*Fade In Magazine*

<http://www.fadeinmag.com/>

1. Perhaps the greatest benefit is students' engagement in their work in electronic environments. Most students enjoy using computers even to write essays, and incorporation of MOOs, bulletin boards, and email in the writing classroom generally results in more interest in participation and, therefore, the production of more text. These benefits are likely goals we have for students in any classroom environment.

2. When students engage in conversation through text, not only do they produce more text, but their awareness of audience increases. They are likely to think more about how to communicate a particular point to a particular reader after they have had some conference or email experiences which required them to clarify and negotiate meaning. This kind of awareness is often more difficult to develop in the traditional classroom when students are producing the conventional essay for the "general reader" whom they have had little or no experience imagining, given that their real audience has been one or more teacher-evaluators.

3. As students converse in these environments, we often see not just a more genuine student voice in their writing but the playful construction of multiple writerly identities. Conscious play with self-portrayal develops their awareness of matters such as the tone they can create through their word choice, syntax, etc.

4. Such play often results in a realignment of authority in the classroom. Any teacher who has used a synchronous computer environment has learned that the teacher's voice is only one of many. This results in classroom discussion that may feel chaotic (see Taylor) compared to traditional face-to-face classroom interaction. However, students are usually more invested in their exchange of opinions than they are in teacher-regulated class discussion, more students get the opportunity to speak in the same period of time, and student authority may ultimately be taken more seriously by both teacher and peers.  (These phenomena also emerge, in less chaotic appearance, in asynchronous conferencing and class listserv discussions.) The establishment of the student's authority as a writer is a goal of writing instruction.

5. Electronic environments contribute substantially to a collaborative and intertextual writing environment. It is easy for students to work on texts together; indeed, any electronic conference is necessarily a collaboratively produced text. Referencing each other's texts and Web documents is as easy as cutting and pasting. In such environments, students can develop threading and synthesizing skills as well as distributing meaning over short units of text.

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# Teaching Activities: Film Technique (developed by students in CI5472, Spring, 2004)

Jennifer Larson

I'm going to be trying this idea out in class in about a week. The theme for this trimester in my class is power; we have read *Things Fall Apart* and will read *Antigone*, and we are finishing up a unit on persuasive writing. We haven't done anything with power and media, though, and I'm not keen on examining the power in politics, which is all over the media now. I've decided to show my students an episode of my favorite TV show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and use that as a way of seeing how power and powerlessness are visually created and emphasized.

Since so few students have had any media classes such as the Art of Film, I plan on introducing then at a basic level to how the shots, by camera angle, movement, and framing, can display power and powerlessness. (I might add other film techniques such as lighting to the info share, but I'm not sure.) The shots are a big thing in Buffy, where the main character is often given the "hero shot" from an angle below.

After the information sharing, students will pair with another student and note places where the shots emphasized power and lack of power in characters as they view the episode. Each pair will present one idea to the class after viewing and discussing with each other. The episode I'll show is "Band Candy," where all the adults start acting like teens after eating tainted band candy. If I remember correctly, the shots illustrate their transition from powerful to powerless for the adults and vice versa with Buffy, who has to become the adult in the episode.

Louise Covert and Rebecca Robertson

Romeo & Juliet: Using film technique to communicate culture and custom

To help our eighth/ninth grade students understand and interpret Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*, we would create a Webquest about 16th century English culture and customs that they would explore in advance of asking them to read/view the play.

The Webquest would give them choices concerning what aspect or area of Elizabethan England they want to examine via the Internet. The choices would include:

- Biographical information about Shakespeare himself

- Entertainment in 16th Century England

- Marriage and courtship

- Friendships for males and females

- Gatherings - parties, holidays, funerals, and customs common to these kinds of events

- Religion and religious customs & rituals

- Family Ties roles and responsibilities of family members in society

- Other options as presented by individual students or partners

Students would report-out their Webquest findings using one of several methods:

Presentation

Video

Written report (also posted on class web site)

Mind map with oral interpretation for the class

Then, to incorporate elements of teaching film technique/analysis/appreciation, students would be asked to connect the focus of their Web-based inquiry about Elizabethan England to a scene from the movie, *Romeo and Juliet,* set in contemporary times.

Students would be asked to look at similarities and differences (compare and contrast) and talk about how the contemporary context for this film either made no difference at all or somewhat or greatly altered how that scene unfolded in relation to what their research told them about the custom and/or culture of Romeo and Juliet’s time.

A part of the narrative about the scene would include information about the lighting, sound, special effects, camera angles & shots, and how these are other film techniques served to communicate and support a particular time period and cultural perspective of this Shakespeare tragedy.

Students would present their research and findings by showing the class the film clip of their scene and talking over the tape about one or more techniques that support their Webquest research findings.

Kathryn Connors and Amy Gustafson

This idea would come towards the middle or end of a language arts or media studies class. In order for the students to show that they have learned and understood all the film elements we've discussed in class, they would be asked to create a short video segment (at least 5 minutes).

We would require that they have at least four-six of the discussed film elements/techniques such as close-up, long-shot, tilt, sound, etc. The film would be tied into a novel/short story/poem that the students had already studied in the class. For example, the students might choose to take characters from a novel and create a "missing scene."

Once finished, the students would present their videos to the class, highlighting why they chose to use the techniques that they did. They would also be required to write a 1-2 page reflection talking about both why they used the film techniques they used and how it aided or enhanced their understanding of both the text they chose to build their video off of and the power of media.

Jamie Pehl

This activity would come after students have learned the terminology required to discuss film-editing technique. A 3-minute-clip must be chosen, but chosen carefully. This is so because one is needed that has a variety of different types of techniques. Students will be in groups of 3-4. The clip will be played 3-4 times. Each time, each individual group member is responsible for focusing on one specific technique. He or she must describe the technique, how it is done, and just as importantly why it is done. For example, a student examining the use of close-ups would describe a specific close-up shot and the purpose for that shot in the context of the scene. After each showing, students rotate roles within their groups and do the same type of analysis for a different technique. Once everyone has completed an analysis for all of the presented techniques, a discussion takes place in which students compare, contrast, and even argue their rationales.

Lindsay Kroog and Jodi Laframboise

As far as the teaching idea goes, I was reading in our class textbooks and came across something that might work nicely. I have recently been challenged in my thinking concerning teaching genre. As a reading teacher this concept for middle school students (all seventh graders) seems more difficult than I expect. It is harder to give examples of genre from written material (using excerpts) than it would be using visual material.

The more I think about this the more intrigued I am. I would really like to incorporate a unit study using media to parallel the different genre's kids read all the time. In fiction, target mystery, suspense, realistic fiction, science fiction, humor, romance...the list could go on and on. So my idea is to design a mini unit studying genre using media. Share examples with the students before allowing them to build their own presentation using clips of movies that display the features in the movie that create that specific genre. In doing this, the students need to learn the basics of viewing video/DVD to dissect the movie.

Meghan Scott and Megan Dwyer-Gaffey

We decided to look at this prompt in a slightly different light. Instead of thinking in terms of a film studies or media studies course, we wanted to incorporate film technique into our standard English courses. We wanted to use the tableau or snapshot activity to act out a scene from a text we are studying. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this technique it is basically acting out a scene without using dialogue to get a better feel for where people are positioned within the scene, the gestures they are making, their facial expressions, their relationship to each other, etc. We would do this as a large group to get students thinking about how they look at texts and, more importantly, why they view things as they do. Then, after introducing the necessary terminology (tilt, tracking, camera angles, etc.) we would ask students to film a scene of their choosing in the tableau format. They would string a long set of these snapshots together to form a complete scene. They would then present these films to the class and give oral presentations explaining why and how they shot and arranged how they did.

Tamela McCartney and Kimberly Sy

Old vs. New

This activity can be used as a way to introduce film and its technologies or as an advanced application of film knowledge.

Show portions of two movie versions of the same story, particularly two that are quite a few years apart (ex: *Ocean's Eleven* & *Ocean's Eleven*, *The Wizard of Oz* & *The Wiz*, two versions of *Romeo and Juliet*). Have students view the oldest version of the film first, using a viewing guide that instructs them to write down any visual or auditory components that catch their eyes. Then, have them watch the same part of the story using the newer film version and fill out the same viewing guide.

After the viewing, facilitate and participate in a discussion with the class about the differences between the films:

What technological differences exist?

Why have films changed throughout time?

Which film portrays the story line most affectively?

Why did the directors make such different or similar decisions about the film's portrayal?

How does the time period in which each of the films were created affect the film?

As a follow-up assignment, students could watch their favorite movie and fill out a generic viewing guide that helps them see the similarities between the movies they watch today and movies from the past.

OR

Students could produce a short segment of a film, using some of the techniques that the older film displayed.

OR

Students could pick one aspect of film technology that they think has had a most significant impact and write a short report on its role in film development over the years.

Anne Holmgren and Dixie Boschee

We wanted to think of a culminating activity to a critical film class--during the unit we will have taught film techniques (camera shots, lighting, sound/music, editing, etc) and then focused extensively on how these techniques convey meaning in the film. As it's an English class, we will be specifically interested in how the students can identify themes based on film techniques (heavy use of dark colors, for example, creating a mood that reflects the main character's feelings of hopelessness).

As a culminating activity, we will have a film festival--maybe two or three days long, depending on the length of film clips we require. Each student will identify a film clip, much as we have in class, and bring it in to share with the class. There will be a list of things they must comment on (we can use this list as a rubric for grading, too) either before, during or after the clip. As a way of preparing for the film festival (and just something fun to do with the students), they could create posters a week or so in advance illustrating some of the themes in their movie.

Not only will this just be a fun way to culminate a film unit, the students will have to be ultra-prepared and fluent in their knowledge of film techniques, as there is nothing more intimidating than presenting in front of a group of peers. This activity is assuming a 3-4 week unit on film and extensive use of clips during the unit to illustrate these techniques to the students. They could even bring popcorn...

Daniel Gough and Adam Banse

We would have students re-shoot scenes of their choosing from films that they liked in order to emphasize certain themes that they have identified within their movie.

Many movies, like any text, can be interpreted in a number of different ways. Students may disagree about who has the power in particular scene for instance, or on the intentions of certain characters.

Students would have to select a scene from a movie and then re-shoot it using a storyboard technique to isolate the technical changes that they would make. For each adaptation, students would need to explain what technical aspect of the shot they are changing and their motivation for doing so (what impact does their decision have thematically?)

It would be easy to stipulate specific number or types of adaptations that need to be used and this activity could be scaffolded to fit the technical know how of the students.

Erin Grahmann and Erin Warren

We wanted to start our media studies planning with a very basic lesson that would introduce a basic topic of film studies: use of camera angles. A great beginning and well-known clip to demonstrate this with would be the emotional death scene of Boromir at the end of *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*.

Begin the class by showing the students this clip without intro. Then do a mini-lecture on the usage of camera angles: how they can frame the shot, convey intimacy or solitude, and the presence or absence of power in a character, and how all these things can create moods non-verbally. Then review the clip, with the students generating ideas on how the camera angles are used in the scene. What will probably be stated first is that the camera is tight on the faces of both characters, creating a feeling of intimacy. They will see how Boromir is put in a weak position, as he is dying, and how Aragorn is viewed as above him, in the strong position as a healthy warrior. Also noted will be the fact that the weaker, lower-viewed Boromir is admitting for the first time that Aragorn is not only the rightful king, but HIS leader- he becomes vulnerable. The subtle camera angles emphasize these important moods in ways that the students probably never noticed, but now feel empowered to identify and learn from. This would be a great way to intro a film study unit, or even a whole year of class.

Amanda Furth

Introduce & discuss specific advertising techniques.

Have students find two examples of each advertising technique.

For each example, students should answer the questions 1) how is the specific advertising technique being demonstrated in this example, 2) what is the meaning / message being expressed by the advertisement, and 3) is the advertisement effective and why or why not.

Introduce & discuss specific film techniques: extreme close-up, close-up, medium shot, tracking, lead space, head room, long shot, extreme long shot, etc.

Use television advertisement to discuss the advertising & film techniques that have been considered.

Have students develop their own television advertisement using the advertising & film techniques considered as student expectations and criteria for grading.

Rachel Godlewski and Jessie Dockter

Poetic Images Through Film

This activity was developed through the idea of teaching poetry and film simultaneously, with special emphasis on the images created through poetry.

This could work one of two ways: 1) students could select images from poetry to express in film or 2) students could analyze images from film, and create poetry around those. By creating “cinematic poetry,” students would think carefully about the images created through words in poetry in order to duplicate the meaning on screen. Doing this would force students to think critically about the messages images convey to an audience. Through their use of music, lighting, voice over, and even text, students could build a visual representation of the images that poetry creates. Not only would this activity demonstrate students' analysis of the poems, but it would also allow them to apply film techniques.

If teachers have less time to work on this with students, another version of the activity would be to create slideshows of a poem using computer software programs such as Microsoft PowerPoint. Students could still experiment with the use of color, sound, and timing to create mood and meaning.

Adrien Everest

In the reading of Edgar Allen Poe's dark stories, I've always noticed the precision he uses in writing specifically separate scenes. For a class film activity, I would like my class to relate a scene in one of Poe's short stories or poems in a digital movie or slideshow. By using images and sounds that they think convey Poe's ideas, the students can get an idea of what is so scary or troubling about his writing.

For example, in reading “The Fall of the House of Usher,” the last scene of our protagonist's realization that his friend has buried his sister alive, is a very disturbing but potent scene. I would show still images of two men in fear and confusion and darkness, with scary music of course. This activity would allow students to express visually what they see in Poe's words and in the world he creates for them.

Josh Wetjen and Tom Deshotels

Today, in a film studies class I observed, I noticed how students are quite savvy about film techniques and remember scenes from favorite movies vividly. One method of teaching film could be to start with the basics of film production. The unit could start by going over the basics of framing, editing and lighting. Students could meet in small groups and the teacher could assign each a film technique. The students in the small group would then have to select a clip demonstrating that technique and present it to the class. A variation on this idea would have students do something similar, but at the end of a unit. In this case students could film their own movie segments that make use of their assigned technique. They would still present this to the rest of the class and explain why they chose to film the segment in that particular manner.

Kari Gladen and Katie Schultz

For our lesson plan, we decided to incorporate the 1994 movie, *Muriel’s Wedding*, directed by PJ Hogan. The movie is a somewhat dark comedy following the life of Muriel as she struggles to find happiness and fit into a culture full of impossible expectations. As an introduction to the film, we would ask kids to find video clips, magazine ads, or other artifacts that convey images of brides, fairy tale weddings, and cultural symbols of marriage.

As we show the film, we would ask students to take note of the ways Muriel feels pressured to buy into all these images in order to find true happiness. We would ask students to focus on the ways that emotion can be conveyed without words through camera angle, lighting, color, etc. Cinematic elements such as how the camera focuses on physical appearance and body language as well as how camera positioning helps to portray Muriel's feelings of being either an outsider or an insider, depending on her circumstances within the film would also be addressed. As a final part of the project, we would ask students to make a make up a poster board collage using their own art and magazine clippings to convey the societal pressures Muriel feels throughout the movie. The project would be like a storyboard, but all symbols. As a group we would have students discuss and ask questions about each other’s final work.

Scott Devens

For my activity I was already thinking of designing something related to students creating flip books when I realized similar idea was mentioned in module 3. Except I was thinking of doing the activity as a way to introduce the whole concept of what a film really is to young middle-schoolers, not just animation concept. I could even show them a short DVD that my brother-in-law created after a recent family gathering. There are sections where not much happens that need editing to create interest and then there are sections (with music) that involve short cuts that are MUCH more interesting to view. Anyway, using flip books would give students a hands-on way to realize that a film is really a series of still shots assembled to give the illusion of goings on. Would use it to discuss the term "motion picture". Flip books help us to understand that slowly "changing" picture is really what gives the illusion of often fast-moving "motion" pictures.