

Cinematic Storytelling- How Filmmakers Tell A Story: Understanding the Language of Film

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| Lesson Title & Arts Area | Cinematic Storytelling- How Filmmakers Tell A Story: Understanding the Language of Film |
| School & Grade Level | Grades 5-12 |
| Arts Educator Lesson Designer | Frank Baker |
| Short statement about designer & lesson development & place in Long Range Plans | <p>Frank Baker is a national media educator who teaches visual, media and film literacy. He maintains the Media Literacy Clearinghouse website (www.frankwbaker.com). He has used this activity many times as an introduction to film literacy, and the language of film.</p> <p>LRP: If the teacher is introducing techniques used in other media, this lesson plan on film making would be a nice follow-up. After the lesson, the teacher could post the “languages of film” in the classroom as a guide for future analysis of any video or film.</p> |
| Unit Description Big idea? Essential questions? | <p>UD: Using a film clip from a popular culture text (found online) students will use critical viewing skills to begin the process of “reading” a film</p> <p>BI: Watching a film actively rather than passively</p> <p>ES: What are the techniques and tools filmmakers use to create meaning in their works?</p> |
| South Carolina Visual and Performing Arts Standards Addressed | <p>Standard 3: The student will access, analyze, interpret, and create media texts</p> <p>MA5-3.5 –MA8-3.5 Identify creative techniques used in a variety of media texts (for example, television, film, radio, Internet).</p> <p>MAHS1-3.4 – MAHS4-3.4 Identity the codes and conventions used in media texts and explain the ways that they help to create meaning.</p> |
| Instructional Objectives | <p>Introduce the language of film</p> <p>Help students to “read” (analyze, interpret, deconstruct) film</p> <p>Help students understand how filmmakers use tools and techniques to communicate meaning</p> <p>Help students become active, critical viewers and listeners</p> |
| Description of Instruction | Student viewing of a film clip followed by discussion and analysis of same |

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| Teacher Procedures | <p>The teacher will be using a popular culture text as the hook to help students appreciate how filmmakers tell stories, create meaning and to better understand the languages of moving images (see full explanation below the lesson plan).</p> <p>A discussion might start with the question: “how are films made”. Many students don’t know that a script (screenplay) must first be written; storyboards (visual representations) are created, and both are used by each member of the crew to create the film.</p> <p>The director has a number of tools (and techniques) at his/her disposal. I call these the “languages of moving images” or the “languages of film.” They are detailed below the lesson plan. They are not shared with the students initially. The lesson starts with the screening of a popular culture text-to get students accustomed to recognizing and understanding the tools and techniques.</p> <p>The opening scene of “ET: The Extra Terrestrial” is shown with no prior instruction-students will watch passively, much the same way they do now. (NOTE: Because the scene is very dark, the classroom should be as dark as possible to get the best resolution on the projection screen.) At the end of the first showing, the teacher disseminates a series of index cards, (pasted below the lesson plan template) one card to groups of students seated together. The cards have specific instructions (about one of the languages of film) for students to follow. Teachers should provide time for the index card to be passed around so that each student in each group has read it. Next, she instructs students to pay close attention as she plays the clip again. Some students may wish to take notes based on what their index card says. After the second screening, give students in each group time (say 5 minutes) to collaborate and discuss what they saw. At the appropriate time, the teacher calls on each group. A leader in the group should first read aloud his/her card-because other groups won’t know what the cards say. After reading the card aloud, the leader and members of the group share what they saw/heard.</p> <p>To conclude, the teacher may initiate a discussion about other films and the specific tools and/or techniques they use to communicate meaning. The teacher may also assign students to select their favorite film and to write a “film analysis” essay/blog post using the language of film as the focus of that analysis.</p> |
| Student Activities | <p>Students will watch the first 8 minutes of the film “ET: The Extra Terrestrial.” They will watch initially with no instruction. After receiving index cards with specific instruction on one of the languages of film, they will watch a second time with a focus on one of the languages of film. In groups, they will discuss their index card assignment with one another. When called on by the teacher, they will share their findings with the entire class.</p> |
| Assessment | <p>Activity Rubric/Checklist Class discussion</p> |
| Materials Needed | <p>Computer (connected to the Internet) Access to YouTube (or ability to download and save clip for playback) ET clip via YouTube: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aS-K60xZ8Gg Video Projector Sound system (e.g. speakers connected to computer playing back the video) Handout: Languages of Film (pasted below) Language of Film Index Cards (pasted below)</p> |
| Resources | <p>Teaching Critical Thinking With The Movies http://usatodayeducation.com/teacherslounge/index.php/2012/02/teaching-critical-thinking-with-the-movies/ The Language of Film Website www.frankwbaker.com/language_of_film Cinema: How Hollywood Films are made http://www.learner.org/exhibits/cinema/ Teacher Guide: Academy Award series http://www.oscars.org/education-grants/teachers-guide-seriesTexts: Moving Images, Making Movies, Understanding Media, ISBN: 1435485858 Coming Distractions: Questioning Movies Frank Baker, Capstone Press, ISBN: 9780736867665 Great Films and How to Teach Them William Costanzo NCTE, ISBN: 0-8141-3909-4 Reel Images Film and Television (2nd Ed) Barrie McMahon, Robyn Quin ISBN: 0-7329-2944-X Teaching Scriptwriting, Screenplays and Storyboards for Film & TV Production BFI, ISBN 0-85170-974-5 Understanding Film Texts Meaning and Experience BFI ISBN 0-85170-799-8 How to Read a Film: The World of Movies, Media, and Multimedia: Language, History, Theory James Monaco, Oxford University Press; ISBN: 019503869X Film Art, An Introduction (5th Ed) David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson McGraw Hill College Div; ISBN: 0070066345 Additional resources can be found in the support document for this standard: http://www.frankwbaker.com/media_literacy_supportdoc.htm</p> |
| Attachments | <p>See Languages of Film explanation and ET Index Cards pasted below lesson</p> |
| Curriculum Connections | <p>ELA: Informational texts, as defined in the most recent SC standards include: news, magazine articles, advertisements, movie reviews, photos, commercials, documentaries, and other forms of multimedia informational texts.IRA/NCTE Standards for The English Arts http://www.readwritethink.org/standards/ 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.</p> |

THE LANGUAGES OF FILM/MOVING IMAGES (video, television and film)

CAMERAS:

a. camera position: far away; close up; up high; eye level; down low

b. camera movement: pan; tilt; truck

c. camera lens: wide angle; normal; telephoto

Good explanations of above can be found [here](#)

LIGHTS

Good explanations can be found [here](#)

SOUND (including music)

Good explanations can be found [here](#)

Another good explanation [here](#)

EDITING (and other post-production techniques)

editing glossary [here](#)

SET DESIGN

full explanation found [here](#)

ACTORS:

a. wardrobe- the clothes they wear ([Costume Designer](#))

b. expressions- what their facial expressions reveal

c. body language- how they hold themselves, sit or stand

d. makeup

LANGUAGE OF FILM INDEX CARDS

CUT OUT EACH OF THESE AND PASTE ONE PER CARD FOR DISTRIBUTION

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| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>LIGHTING</u></p> <p>What time of day it is? What are the clues? What effect does lighting have? Use two or three adjectives to describe the lighting.</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>SOUND EFFECTS</u></p> <p style="text-align: center;">CLOSE YOUR EYES</p> <p>You are only to listen to the scene, after which you will be asked to make a list of everything you heard, and then share.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>MUSIC</u></p> <p>Describe the music at the beginning–middle–and end of the scene.What happens and why? How does the music contribute to the mood or feel? Is the music effective?</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>CAMERA: MOVEMENT</u></p> <p>Document when the director/ cinematographer uses: Pan (left or right move) Tilt (up or down move) A crane shot (high above)What is the purpose of these actions?</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><u>EDITING</u></p> <p>Most of us never notice editing,but it is important. Count the number of edits in this scene. What impact does editing have?</p> | <p style="text-align: center;"><u>CAMERA: LENS</u></p> <p>Document when the director/ cinematographer uses: Wide shot Medium Shot Close Up Zoom in or outWhy does he use these shots when he/ she does?</p> |

MOOD

What mood does this scene
put you in? How do you
feel?

Why do you feel this way?

What has the director done
to push your emotional
buttons?
(be specific)

NON –VERBAL LANGUAGE:

ACTOR EXPRESSIONS Notice
the expressions on the
faces of each of the
actors.

Watch for any changes.
Be prepared to discuss
their expressions
and what they might mean.