

# To Kill A Mockingbird: Camera Shots / Cinematography

## TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD: SEEING THE FILM THROUGH THE LENS OF MEDIA LITERACY

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### **CAMERA SHOTS/CINEMATOGRAPHY**

The exact shot framed by the cinematographer can communicate many things to the viewing audience. (TKAM cinematographer Russell Harlan was nominated for an Academy Award in the category “Best Black-and-White Cinematography” for his work on this film.) The framing of a particular shot can communicate power or weakness, for example.

Other considerations-

Students could also notice:

- high and low angle shots
- when the camera moves and why
- the distance between camera and actor or action.

“Often a low angle reinforces the sense that the subject is large  
or dominant or imposing or powerful, but not always.”

**With the camera low-shooting UP**– it gives the audience the impression that someone is larger, towering, more important or powerful

“Often a low angle reinforces the sense that the subject is large

or dominant or imposing or powerful, but not always.”<sup>1</sup>

**With the camera high-shooting DOWN**– it gives the audience the impression that someone is smaller, less significant, helpless, or vulnerable

“...a high angle does not always make the subject(s) seem small, vulnerable, or weak, though in many contexts it does.” <sup>1</sup>

**Close Ups (primarily faces, signify intimacy)<sup>2</sup>**



Images above from TCM Essentials website

**Medium Shots (most of body, personal relationship)<sup>2</sup>**



**Wide/Long/Establishing Shots**

**(setting & characters; context, scope, public distance)<sup>2</sup>**



**Grammar of Television** (Berger) can also be applied to film <sup>3</sup>

Signifier (shot)	Definition	Signified
close-up	face only	intimacy
medium shot	most of the body	personal relationship
long shot	setting & characters	context, scope, public distance
full shot	full body of person	social relationship
pan down	camera looks down	power, authority
pan up	camera looks up	smallness, weakness
zoom in	camera moves in	observation, focus
fade in	image appears on blank screen	beginning

fade out	image screen goes blank	ending
cut	switch from one image to another	simultaneity, excitement
wipe	image wiped off screen	imposed

—

Learn more about camera shots, focus, lighting and other techniques in the text:

*Reading In The Dark, Using Film As A Tool in the English Classroom*, by John Golden,  
published by NCTE

### Recommended Links

[Camera shots](#)

[Film Language: Use of the Camera](#)

[The Grammar of TV & Film](#)

Making Movies Make Sense: [Framing](#)

[Seeing Through the Image: Cinematography](#)