

TODAY YOU WILL...

- > CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF CAMERA WORK ON CREATING TENSION IN A FILM SEQUENCE
- > DEVELOP KNOWLEDGE OF HOW EDITING AND SOUND CREATES DRAMA
- > EVALUATE THE SUCCESSFULNESS OF THE FILM MAKERS IN HOOKING THE AUDIENCE AT THE START OF A FILM
- > COME UP WITH IDEAS TO MARKET A NEW FILM USING PROFESSIONAL TECHNIQUES

SCREEN TEST

LUCY METCALFE EXPLAINS HOW TO GET YOUR MEDIA STUDIES STUDENTS THINKING MORE CREATIVELY ABOUT FILMS...

Despite often being derided as an 'easy' subject, media studies poses many challenges for teachers and students alike. Try teaching young people to understand the nuances of sound, visuals, characters and technical composition and then getting them to respond to the text in very few words... it's quite a task! It's also one of the most fulfilling subjects to teach and learn about. Offering students a broad range of opportunities to write, explore, create and evaluate, such a broad set of skill requirements is hard to find elsewhere across the curriculum. Moreover, it's a subject that lends itself neatly to working collaboratively with others; think learning about cross-cultural issues through the media; understanding business and enterprise through marketing music; or using advanced ICT programs such as Photoshop or iMovie. One of the most popular topics in this subject is teaching film; it's an extremely interesting way of getting students to interact with the media on a number of levels, be creative themselves and quickly see that, by using independent skills, they can be successful whatever their ability.

STARTER ACTIVITY

Watch the opening of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. Whilst doing so, get your students to note down the techniques used which make them want to keep watching. When they have seen this opening, review what they've written. You'll be surprised at how much there is to write about in a three to four minute sequence. For example, most will comment on the use of the tracking shots and the POV shots, which help the viewers anticipate the death of

the caretaker. Others will focus on sound and comment on how this builds tension, or uses the theme tune to clearly brand the film. Do make sure they consider the use of lighting (drawing on horror conventions to create a gloomy exposition), and the use of mise-en-scene to enhance this atmosphere further (the skulls, spiders' webs and creepy house).

You could go further with this analysis by asking students to

consider the representations in this sequence, such as how the villainy is portrayed by the conspirators and how this provides a hook into the rest of the film.

The starter activity also enables you to introduce or revise key terminology for the study of film: genre, camera shots and movement techniques, sound techniques (diegetic/non-diegetic soundtrack), mise-en-scene.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

1. Taking it apart

Students usually get very confident at film analysis once they have learnt the skills of deconstruction. Sometimes you'll find yourself having to stop them writing too much rather than encouraging them to produce more. If you're working to a tight word limit, try using highlighters to mark out where students address film language in their writing. This is helpful for your stronger writers, who may find it hard to keep focused on analysis and drift into description of events. You could also encourage the use of bullet points or sub-headings to keep the writing focused.

Try this by looking at the sequence from *'The Hunger Games'* where Katniss and Peeta are attacked by the Mutts and then fight Cato. Students will notice quickly the difference in pace created by the use of cuts together with the music. Consider here how the action is dramatically sped up during the chase and then reduced as Cato grapples with Peeta, creating the enigma of who will live and who will die. Again this sequence is also great for exploring character – the hero and villain roles are fairly distinctive, yet we sympathise with Cato due to his gory death. Try to get students here to comment also on the ideology of the Games themselves. The scene in which the Mutts are created raises interesting questions on the morality of reality TV. Perhaps your stronger students will be able to draw conclusions on the wider impact of the media.



NOW SHOWING...

Whichever films you choose to present in your classrooms, make sure they are contemporary. Students buy into the action much more readily if they are familiar with the films already or are likely to delve further into them beyond the classroom. This is very important if the task they are asked to complete for assessment involves choosing their own texts. Your starting point in the classroom is crucial in encouraging students to choose their films purposefully, and ultimately this often results in a much stronger response for assessment.



INFORMATION CORNER

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lucy Metcalfe is an experienced Head of Media currently teaching in a large secondary school in Essex. She also writes and presents training materials for GCSE Media Studies, and is an Examiner, Moderator and Advisor for AQA.

HOME LEARNING

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO GO THE CINEMA, AS OFTEN AS POSSIBLE, PARTICULARLY ON OPENING WEEKEND. THIS WILL NOT ONLY WIDEN THEIR SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE, BUT ALSO GIVES THEM THE CHANCE TO READ REVIEWS ON NEW FILMS, DEBATE WITH YOU ON THE MOVIES THEY SEE, BE SOCIABLE, AND SOURCE PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS.

TRY THIS

JOIN IN WITH NATIONAL SCHOOLS FILM WEEK ACTIVITIES, INCLUDING FREE SCREENINGS OF FILMS AND REVIEW WRITING OPPORTUNITIES TO STRETCH AND CHALLENGE YOUR STUDENTS. ALSO JOIN FILMCLUB, WHICH PROVIDES FREE RESOURCES AND DVDS TO TEACH FILM AND INSPIRE YOUR STUDENTS, AS WELL AS ENCOURAGING THEM TO TAKE PART IN COMPETITIONS.

2. Putting it together

Once students have explored how films are constructed, set a brief for your students to follow when creating production or planning work. They could, for example, join your film company and market a new film with a similar audience to *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games*. First, get them to come up with a list of how film companies market their products. This could include trailers, merchandise, chat show appearances, features in magazines, and film posters. Next, get them to select one marketing option. They should then plan their promotion carefully, considering the genre of the film and how to use the signifiers of this genre to tease the intended

audience – so, if creating a film poster for a new horror film, students would most likely use some of the following: creepy house, dark colours / red (blood), a sinister looking villain (possibly hooded / shrouded), a scared girl.

Students respond very well to working in role. You could take this further by including an element of competition – the best film idea gets used to make a trailer either by the students themselves, or by your sixth formers, or your production club if you run one. Perhaps you could also run a mini-Oscars event to reward success here, or you could enter the production work into one of the many film competitions which frequently run.

SUMMARY

Rate the films you've modelled in class or the ones your students have seen recently at the cinema. This is a great way of checking whether the hooks used in the openings or within the sequences studied have encouraged the audiences to continue watching.

You could also run a quick plenary activity by using film posters. Display a selection on your screen or as hand-outs. For each one, ask students to explain which genre the film belongs to and how they know this. You could extend this by getting learners to consider which techniques they could use in the openings of these films to hook their intended audiences – for example, a youth drama like *Kidulthood* would use signifiers of an urban setting, street fashion, and confrontational poses. In the opening sequence you'd expect to see a fight, hear grime music and see fast paced action in an urban setting.