

Guide to Film Analysis in the Classroom

ACMI Education Resource





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GUIDE TO FILM ANALYSIS IN THE CLASSROOM

THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been designed as a guide for teachers to use in the classroom when teaching students how to analyse a film as a text.

CHARACTERISATION

Character Mapping

A character-mapping exercise can often help us understand how filmmakers have developed a character.

1. View the film, then use a table (such as the one on the following page), to record notes about the personalities of the main characters.

2. You might also consider a range of secondary characters and their narrative purpose. Think about how each character is represented then discuss:

- **Appearance/physical attributes:** How is the character presented visually via facial look, body shape and costuming? What do these attributes suggest about the character?
- **Design:** How does the design of the character help to achieve believability? How does design encourage the audience to feel empathy for the character?
- **Voice:** How do the character's words and voice (tone, inflection and timbre) help to establish the character? What does it suggest about the character?
- **Action:** How do the character's actions and behaviours help to establish the character? What other personal traits are evident? Describe the character's motivations, fears and desires.
- **Role:** How does the character relate to the other characters? What effects does the character's behaviour have? Describe the character's role in the overall storyline.
- **Framing:** Where is the character placed in the frame? What else is placed in the frame with the character? What shot types and angles are used?



CHARACTER PROFILE

Character design	Character name	Character name
Physical appearance - key features of character's face and hair		
Physical appearance - key features of character's body		
Costume		
Sound of the voice (tone, inflection, timbre)		
Key phrases		



Key movements, mannerisms, gestures		
Other personal traits		
Motivations, fears, desires		
Relationships with other characters		
Effects of the character's behaviour		



NARRATIVE

Setting

- How does the setting relate to the narrative? In other words, why has a background, location or set for a particular scene/sequence been chosen?
- Are any of the props significant?
- How do the mood and ambience of the setting create meanings for an audience?

Structuring of Time

- Investigate how the narrative manipulates time. How are events ordered? For instance, are events chronological, or does the film use flashbacks or flash forwards?
- Explore the duration of events - that is, the expansion or contraction of time.
- How frequently are events or scenes shown in comparison with their presumed occurrence and existence?

Point of View (POV) from which the Narrative is Presented

- From whose POV is the narrative presented?
- Do we see the narrative through one character's eyes or more than one? Why? What are the effects of this?
- Is the POV different from that of the other characters? What is the effect of this?
- What story information is given or withheld at different points in the narrative? What effect does this have?
- How is POV technically communicated to an audience?

Cause and Effect

- What motivates the characters?
- What events are motivated by character?
- If there are natural or supernatural causes, what are their consequences?

Opening and Closure

- Are conflicts, motivations and issues resolved or unresolved by the end of the film?



- What expectations are established in the beginning and resolved or remain unresolved at the end?
- How are character developments, themes/issues and resolutions dealt with in the closing sequences?

Narration

- Why do we have a narrator?
- Comment on the tone and the rhythm of the narration.

Themes and Issues

- What themes and issues are introduced and how are they developed and explored?
- Are certain themes and issues exclusively related to particular characters? How do the themes and issues work in with the storyline?

CLOSE ANALYSIS: PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

Camera Work

- Angle (high, low, eye level, aerial) and movement of shots (shot-reverse-shot, panning, tracking, tilting).
- Distance of shots (i.e. close-up, mid shots, long shots and extremes of this), shot size and camera movement.
- Duration of shot on screen: what impact does the concentration of the length of a shot have on the audience?
- What meaning is created for an audience by using different shot sizes, movement and camera angles?
- How does the camerawork inform the audience about a character's motivations, create identification with characters and communicate their relationship to the story?
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- How is an audience's engagement with the narrative created by the choice of camerawork?

Lighting

- Is the lighting natural/artificial, realistic or expressive? How does it set a mood or create an atmosphere?
- Why and how effective is this?
- Are any lighting effects used, for example, to emphasis an object, a character or an action?



Explain.

Mise-en-Scène

The way each shot is composed within the frame has an effect on the way we respond to the narrative. Composition relates to the production elements and story elements.

Look at how the following aspects of composition are arranged in particular scenes or in a sequence:

- Setting and set design
- Costumes and objects
- Colours
- Arrangement and movement within the frame
- Spatial relations between objects and characters (spacing)
- Framing: how is the shot framed, that is how is it positioned within the square of the frame?

Freeze-Frame a Scene

For a clear analysis of mise-en-scène, freeze-frame on a selected scene and discuss the mise-en-scène and its relationship to the narrative. Consider the following in your discussion and analysis:

- Lighting: how are shadows and patterns used to create mood, atmosphere and meanings?
- Framing: What is in the frame? What has been left out?
- Placement of objects: How are objects placed within the frame and why?
- Setting/location: Where is the action located and why?
- Where are the characters placed within the frame and why.

Editing

- How do placement, timing, and the rhythm of the editing affect the mood of a sequence and the mood of the overall film?
- How do the shots relate to each other visually and aurally – image to image, sound to sound, image to sound?

Sound

- Listen to the sound of the film. How is atmosphere created via the sound design?
- Consider the music, sound effects (including atmospheric sound) and what they convey.



- Look at the way any dialogue or narration is recorded.
- How does the soundtrack relate to the storylines, themes and issues of the narrative, characters and plot? Focus on both diegetic and non-diegetic sound.
- Reflect on the use of music – how does it add to the meanings associated with each character?
- How has music been used to support themes?
- How do the layers (atmosphere, dialogue, sound effects and music) work together to create the sound design?
- Are there any special or unconventional applications and explorations of sound design? Explain.

Acting/Performance

- How does the actor's performance contribute to the characterisation?
- Does the actor bring associations from outside the narrative to the character?
- What effect does this create in terms of character believability/acceptance?
- Does an audience have empathy for the characters? How is this achieved?
- Are there characters that repel the audience? Why?