USING FILM IN THE CLASSROOM

Choosing Films

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In choosing films for classroom study, teachers, schools and/or school jurisdictions
need to consider how well the film will help students meet the outcomes, but they must
also consider the quality of the film, appeal and appropriateness for students,
community standards, copyright concerns, cost and availability.
Because students must become critical viewers of non print media, the films chosen for
classroom study often deal with sensitive issues. Therefore, care must be taken both in
the choice of films and in the kinds of learning activities that are planned around the
films.

Ratings

video and DVD. Since showing a movie in a classroom is deemed a public performance,
classification ratings must be observed. Teachers are strongly advised to preview any movie
before showing it to students.

Teaching Film

"It is only through an understanding of the structure of a medium that one can gain real access to
its message."
Movies produce an emotional response in audiences. We can be amused, frightened,
excited; we can experience sorrow, pity, tension, patriotism, revulsion. In fact, any
human emotion can be induced by a well-made film. Many movies are designed to
pull the audience into the story—to identify strongly with, or at least to care about, the
central character—to provide audiences with a vicarious experience in an "other
world," and above all, to make audiences forget they are watching a movie. Audiences
are influenced to react to situations and conditions; to believe in the veracity of events;
to accept the ideas and ideals promoted in the film; and to adopt values, interpretations
and perspectives. An audience can even be persuaded to buy products that are placed
in scenes, especially when these products are seen as contributing to the enjoyment,
relief and/or success of characters who use them. Cinema presents a powerful
influence that contributes to cultural change, coaching us to accept or reject aspects of
our society, inspiring the way we dress, popularizing our expressions, shaping

language and meaning, and persuading our self-image.

Hollywood Style and its conventions subordinate narrative technique to keep the audience focused on character and story. A basic rule of Hollywood Style is to keep the audience unaware of individual artistic elements. The audience must forget it is watching a movie. Any technique that draws attention to itself distracts the audience from the characters and the unfolding narrative. These tools of film narrative are evident, however, when one looks for them in the analytical process: first, by learning to recognize the various elements; next, by applying this knowledge to the analysis of a scene; finally, by examining the entire film to incorporate structure and form. Understanding not just the film's text, but how the narrative is presented and why, and how decisions have been made in the creation of the film's scenes, will help individuals to appreciate this unique, collaborative art form. At the same time, individuals will come to terms with a very powerful and persuasive medium and recognize why and how motion pictures exert such immense influence on us.

There are a number of considerations in film analysis, including:

• Does the film's theme make a significant social statement? (Alternatively, is the film propagandist in its presentation of events?)

• How has the film made a direct communication with the audience to produce an emotional response?

• Do we find similar techniques and themes in literature?

• Do we find similar techniques and themes in the director's other films that suggest a particular style, approach or philosophy? In other words, could we consider this director an auteur?

The following questions are considerations that can form the basis of a film study. These questions can be used either as part of a generic class discussion or for personal response writing prior to investigating a specific film.

• In general, what attracts us to a film? (Students might consider such things as the film's stars, subject, genre, effects and word of mouth recommendations.) How are films geared to particular audiences?

• Identify a film you saw recently and enjoyed. What reason(s) had you for wanting to see the film? Did the film meet your expectations? (Provide reasons for your

answer.)

Considerations for Film Analysis

Movies have much in common with stories and novels in literature. Edgar Allan Poe defined the short story as narrative writing whose elements combine to produce a single effect. In the Hollywood, or "Classic," style of filmmaking, all elements of the film must combine to create a total effect. No one aspect of the film should stand out to distract the audience.

• Consider the content initially: What is the film's purpose? What ideas are being developed? Who is the intended audience for the film? What is the film's genre?

• Summarize the story in one or two sentences. Next, reduce the film's plot to no more than six words

• What was the story's purpose? Was it strictly an emotional experience for the audience? Was there a sociological theme advanced or a point being made? Is the audience intended to subscribe to a value or cause?

• What factor(s) contributed to the reality of the story or of a particular event within the story?

• Are there any elements of the film that are striking or memorable, such as a false plot device, an effective or symbolic shot, a music theme or cue, or a character's signature expression or action,

• How might one conclude that the film offers the audience wish fulfillment and/or a success story? What does the movie allow members of the audience to experience vicariously that could not, or probably would not, be experienced in their own lives?

• When reflecting on the film, what implausible event, character or detail can you note? Why do you think this detail escaped your attention as you watched the film the first time?

Film Study

Units

The following sample units demonstrate different approaches to teaching film.

"Lighting, Colour, Music: A Study of Film Elements" examines film elements through the use of clips from various films. The film clips are shown in class, then students

choose films to view on their own and compare them to the clips.

V. Extension Activities

1. Have students write a script or story

2. Divide the classroom into various groups, giving each group a motif, such as eyes, mirrors, to track and to discuss their possible meanings. Part of the discussion should include how the film comments on modern society. Students should then bring their ideas to a full class discussion.

3. Have students create out scenes from the film.

6. Have students write about, or demonstrate in a project representation,

1.1.1 Form tentative understandings, interpretations

and positions

1.2.1 Consider new perspectives

1.2.2 Express preferences, and expand interests

2.1.2 Understand and interpret content

2.2.2 Relate elements, devices and techniques to created effects

2.3.1 Connect self, text, culture and milieu

2.3.2 Evaluate the verisimilitude, appropriateness and significance of print and nonprint texts

3.2.1 Select, record and organize information

3.2.3 Form generalizations and conclusions

4.1.2 Consider and address form, structure and medium

4.1.3 Develop content

4.1.4 Use production, publication and presentation strategies and technologies consistent with context

4.2.2 Enhance organization

4.2.3 Consider and address matters of choice

4.2.4 Edit text for matters of correctness

5.2.1 Cooperate with others, and contribute to group processes