

An Introduction to Cine-Literacy

The Essex Writing Project (EWP) looks to improve writing by providing a motivational context for writing. By using a DVD as a text teachers can challenge the ways in which the teaching of writing can be approached and adopt more flexible planning models that encourage pupils to take a role in their own learning.

Children of the 'You Tube' generation are already competent 'readers' of film. Moving behind the lens of the camera into the role of director has more relevance for today's generation than attempting to sit in the 'author's chair'. If children understand composition and effect in film then they are more likely to understand composition and effect in their own writing.

An Introduction to Cine-Literacy

“Does an increased knowledge of camera angles, sound, colour, shape and light and their combined effect in film have an impact on the ability of children to manipulate and improve their written text?”

The EWP research team believe that pupils need a wide range of skills to interpret and comprehend film in order to be effective cinematic learners. This view acknowledges the need to analyse camera angles, colour and shape, light and sound separately in the first instance. We can then consider their combined effect.

Cine-Literacy

A brief outline of:

- Camera angles
 - Sound
 - Colour and shape
 - Light
- ...and how this links to writing!
- The combined effect...

A Teaching Sequence for Camera Angles

Observe	Learn camera angle types and functions through film context and given stills, one or two at a time. Use hands and/or digital cameras to recreate different angles.
Identify	Identify angles from stills in a new context. Sort, label and sequence them. Review the film, spot angles and consider why types of shot were chosen.
Annotate	Compose sentences to go with each still using different angles in a short sequence e.g. a point of tension.
Retell from single still	Compose longer paragraphs from a single still, focusing on setting, characterisation or a significant incident.
Retell from still series	Compose longer paragraphs from stills taken further apart in a scene or across the whole film using a 5-point story planner or genre frame.
Plan	Use storyboarding, drawn or digital, incorporating angles to plan own scenes, stories or non-fiction writing.
Compose	Write using own storyboard and knowledge of director/author intent.

Understanding Camera Angles

LONG SHOTS



LONG SHOTS set the scene. They are often used to introduce a new setting or to signal transfer from one location to another.

Use of longer compound or complex sentences packed with descriptive language to set the scene. Consider the senses.

Understanding Camera Angles

MEDIUM SHOTS



MEDIUM SHOTS move the action along. They show one or more characters from the waist or knees up, sharing actions or dialogue key to the narrative.

Sentences contain events and/or speech to move the story forward.

Understanding Camera Angles

CLOSE UPS



CLOSE UPS often show a character's facial expression in detail. This allows the viewer to share feelings and the character's mood, sometimes in response to other character's or events. They can also be used to highlight an important object. This will be an item of significance to the story where a close up is used to build tension, reveal clues and additional information to the viewer, or to allow scene transition.

Short, sharp sentences can be powerful here, either on their own or as a series, to convey a character's emotions through the description of facial features.

Understanding Camera Angles

POINTS OF VIEW SHOTS



POINTS OF VIEW SHOTS build empathy. Because you are seeing through the eyes of a character, you feel closer to them. You, the viewer, feel as if you are sharing in the experiences – seeing the same things, feeling the same way.

Sentences need to convey mood and response as well as actions. Use adverbs and specific verbs for precise description to 'get inside the character's head'.

Understanding Camera Angles

LOW ANGLE SHOTS



LOW ANGLE SHOTS exaggerate size. This makes a character appear more powerful or menacing. A similar effect can be used with buildings or trees to emphasise their height or enormity.

Explain the way you feel as the viewer beneath and use a broadened vocabulary, including similes and metaphors, to communicate size.

Understanding Camera Angles

HIGH ANGLE SHOTS



HIGH ANGLE SHOTS make a character appear vulnerable or isolated. Because the viewer looks down on them, characters seem small and helpless by comparison.

Use emotive language to convey how the character feels. Consider physical responses of intimidation, embarrassment, loneliness, panic or fear.

Understanding Camera Angles

PANS



PANS show moving action or expand on scene setting. The camera is on a fixed stand then gradually veers left, right, up or down. It moves slowly to allow the viewer to take in specifics.

The content of the pan will dictate what is needed. It will be showing something to be described in detail, whether an action or more of a location.

Understanding Camera Angles

TRACKING SHOTS



TRACKING SHOTS follow a character or an object as it moves. It builds empathy with a character because you are sharing in the same experience or develops tension and anticipation through close monitoring of an object's progress.

Often these are fast moving sequences, so explain the thrill of the chase or the drama of the fall. You can, therefore include vocabulary for speed and movement. Consider the use of repetition to suggest a continuous action or series of actions.

Understanding Camera Angles

AERIALS



AERIALS display additional information. This 'bird's eye view' allows a wider perspective on the setting or action below. It gives a context to the audience which character's at ground level may not have.

In writing, aerials could be treated as an aside, where the narrator shares the benefit of his additional knowledge and viewpoint. If only he knew...

CAMERA ANGLES ACTIVITY

Identify camera angles from the stills. Think about why these camera angles were used (what is the director's intention?)

Compose a sentence to accompany each still thinking about the type of sentence or language you use for effect (have you matched the director's intention?)

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SOUND

“What you hear is as important as what you see when watching a film.”

There are 4 main ways sound is used within a film:

- Soundtrack/music
- Dialogue
- Sound effects
- Silence

SOUND EFFECTS	MUSIC	DIALOGUE	SILENCE
What are they?	What sort is it?	Who speaks?	When?
What is the effect?	What is the effect?	What does it tell us about the characters?	What is the effect?

Impact on writing

Use short extracts to model how different aspects of sound can be written. E.g. watch a short piece with sound effects and ask children to write a corresponding sentence that links with sentence level work (i.e. what you want the pupils to learn). (56:30-57:16)

Use of sound in writing at sentence level

Simple sentence	
Compound sentence	
Complex sentence	
Use of a simile	
Use of a metaphor	
Use of alliteration	
Use of adverbial phrases of time, manner, place	

Use of sound in writing at sentence level

Simple sentence	His feet drummed along the grass.
Compound sentence	His feet drummed along the grass and the wind whistled through his mane.
Complex sentence	As the wind whistled through his mane, his feet drummed along the grass.
Use of a simile	His feet pounded the grass like an African drum.
Use of a metaphor	Alex drummed along the grass.
Use of alliteration	His furry feet drummed dramatically along the green grass.
Use of adverbial phrases of time, manner, place	As the sun set, Alex's feet drummed along the grass (time). Alex's feet drummed rhythmically along the grass (manner). In the wilds of Madagascar, Alex's feet drummed along the grass (place).

Checklist for sound in writing – adding layers of meaning

SOUND	EXAMPLES	MY EXAMPLES
Have I used sound effects?	<p>Alex and Marty began to run, feet drumming rhythmically on the hard ground, wind whistling through their thick hair, wild and free for the very first time.</p> <p>But as Alex ran, he heard a violent rumbling in his tummy as he realised he hadn't eaten meat for days.</p>	
Have I used dialogue? Conversation or thoughts? Does it move the story on?	<p>"This is my territory and I don't ever want to see you on this island again!" he roared. The fossa fled in fear.</p>	
Have I used 'silence' to create a pause for thought for the author?	<p>Alex felt a sharp stab in his bottom. The world swam into blackness and then there was silence.</p>	
What sort of music would I add to accompany my writing?		

COLOUR AND SHAPE

Colour and shape are used to manipulate the audience into thinking or feeling in a certain way.

It is closely linked to lighting effects.

Colour can be used to create settings or moods of scenes. It can be used to convey time of day or year or the passing of time (it is the visual equivalent of time connectives).

Shape and colour are key in the creation of characters.

VILLAINS AND HEROES

Look at the different pictures of characters from films. Can you sort them into heroes and villains? Then think about the colours and shapes that make either the heroes or villains. Record your ideas.

Heroes have:	Villains have:

Hero or Villain?



Impact on writing – *using dialogue to move the story along.*



1. Look at shape. What does this tell you about the characters?
2. Choose a character and write a speech or thought bubble for the character.
3. Add a word other than 'said'.
4. Add an action.

LIGHT



MULTI-LAYERED WRITING – LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CINE-LITERACY

Concentrate on one aspect when watching the film extract. Take one sentence from each person in the group and create a multi-layered group paragraph.

MULTI-LAYERED WRITING – LOOKING AT THE DIFFERENT ASPECTS OF CINE-LITERACY

FILM EFFECT	EXAMPLE SENTENCE
A. SOUND Dialogue Silence Sound effect	
B. CAMERA ANGLE Close up Medium shot Long shot High angle Low angle	
C. LIGHT Ambient (sun, moon) Available (natural sunlight or artificial) Low key lighting (used for horror) High key (bright, conventional)	
D. COLOUR AND SHAPE Good character – blue eyes, wearing white, blue for bravery, rounded, soft feature etc. Bad character – pointed or sharp features, black or dark clothes	

Other ideas

Cine-Literacy can also be used to teach non-fiction text types and poetry.

For example (based on Madagascar):

- Recount: *Class trip to zoo and recount visit*
- Instructions: *How to make sushi*
- Discussion: *Should we keep animals in zoos?*
- Explanation: *How is the baobab tree adapted to its environment?*
- Information texts/Non-Chronological Report: *A Guide to Madagascar; Lions*
- Persuasion: *Advert for tourism in Madagascar, voice over to accompany trailer for film*

Cross Curricular Links

Geography: *Contrasting Locality Overseas*

Science: *Variations, Adaptation & Environment*

DT & Art: Making puppets (characters)

Music: *Feel the pulse (Malagasy music)*

Dance: Malagasy dance and music