**Film 101**

**Survey**

1. Approximately how many movies do you watch a month (on DVD or Cable or in a theater)?
2. What are your favorite types of movie? Explain.
3. What are your least favorite types of movie? Explain.
4. Rank the top five best films ever made, in your opinion.
5. What kind of movies do your parents or guardians like to watch? How often do you watch movies with them?
6. What are the differences between watching a movie at home and watching in a theater?
7. What kind of movies do you watch in school?
8. What are you normally asked by the teacher to do while or after watching a movie in school?

**Film Terminology**

Shots and Framing

**Shot:** a single piece of film uninterrupted by cuts.

**Establishing Shot:** often a long shot or a series of shots that sets the scene. It is used to establish setting and to show transitions between locations.

**Long Shot (LS):** a shot from some distance. If filming a person, the full body is shown. It may show the isolation or vulnerability of the character (also called a Full Shot).

**Medium Shot (MS):** the most common shot. The camera seems to be a medium distance from the object being filmed. A medium shot shows the person from the waist up. The effect is to ground the story.

**Close Up (CU):** the image being shot takes up at least 80 percent of the frame.

**Extreme Close Up:** the image being shot is a part of a whole, such as an eye or a hand.

**Two Shot:** a scene between two people shot exclusively from an angle that includes both characters more or less equally. It is used in love scenes where interaction between the two characters is important.

Camera Angles

**Eye Level:** a shot taken from a normal height; that is, the character’s eye level. Ninety to ninety-five percent of the shots seen are eye level, because it is the most natural angle.

**High Angle:** the camera is above the subject. This usually has the effect of making the subject look smaller than normal, giving him or her the appearance of being weak, powerless, and trapped.

**Low Angle:** the camera films subject from below. This usually has the effect of making the subject look larger than normal, and therefore strong, powerful, and threatening.

Camera Movements

**Pan:** a stationary camera moves from side to side on a horizontal axis.

**Tilt:** a stationary camera moves up or down along a vertical axis

**Zoom:** a stationary camera where the lens moves to make an object seem to move closer to or further away from the camera. With this technique, moving into a character is often a personal or revealing movement, while moving away distances or separates the audience from the character.

**Dolly/Tracking:** the camera is on a track that allows it to move with the action. The term also refers to any camera mounted on a car, truck, or helicopter.

**Boom/Crane:** the camera is on a crane over the action. This is used to create overhead shots.

Lighting

**High Key:** the scene is flooded with light, creating a bright and open-looking scene.

**Low Key:** the scene is flooded with shadows and darkness, creating suspense or suspicion.

**Bottom or Side Lighting:** direct lighting from below or the side, which often makes the subject appear dangerous or evil.

**Front or Back Lighting:** soft lighting on the actor’s face or from behind gives the appearance of innocence or goodness, or a halo effect.

Editing Techniques

**Cut:** most common editing technique. Two pieces of film are spliced together to “cut” to another image.

**Fade:** can be to or from black or white. A fade can begin in darkness and gradually assume full brightness (fade-in) or the image may gradually get darker (fade-out). A fade often implies that time has passed or may signify the end of a scene.

**Dissolve:** a kind of fade in which one image is slowly replaced by another. It can create a connection between images.

**Wipe:** a new image wipes off the previous image. A wipe is more fluid than a cut and quicker than a dissolve.

**Flashback:** cut or dissolve to action that happened in the past.

**Shot-Reverse-Shot:** a shot of one subject, then another, then back to the first. It is often used for conversation or reaction shots.

**Cross Cutting:** cut into action that is happening simultaneously. This technique is also called parallel editing. It can create tension or suspense and can form a connection between scenes.

**Eye-Line Match:** cut to an object, then to a person. This technique shows what a person seems to be looking at and can reveal a character’s thoughts.

Sound

**Diegetic:**  sound that could logically be heard by the characters in the film.

**Non-Diegetic:** sound that cannot be heard by the characters but is designed for audience reaction only. An example might be ominous music for foreshadowing.

Storyboards

These are a series of drawings — or photographs — that a director creates before the movie is filmed to help the director to visualize what will appear later on screen. Often, lighting, dialogue, framing, and other elements of the shot will be noted as well. These individual drawings or photographs are then arranged in sequence to create a final storyboard. Later in this unit you will be asked to create your own storyboard.

Notes About Shots

The following information is designed to assist the teacher and provide background information for the teacher before he or she presents the terminology lesson with students.

We have seen how the **point-of-view** shot works to put the spectator literally in the very place of the character and thus to secure psychological identification with that character. This is only one of the devices by which the cinema seeks to manipulate and control how the spectator feels and what he or she is thinking. Other types of shot **articulations** (what cinematic moves are called in critical discussion) do the same thing. For example, in the **shot-reverse-shot** sequence, the spectator occupies alternately the position of now one character in the dialogue, now the other character, thus switching identifications every few seconds without really knowing it. Another type of shot that has the effect of manipulating the viewer is without doubt the **close-up**. In the early years of the cinema, there were no close-ups, only long shots, so that the spectator was always held at a good distance from the characters; this distance worked against the identification processes that modern cinema seeks to encourage.

When you see a close-up, for instance, you have the sense of being in very intimate connection with the character, close indeed to him or her emotionally and thus able to register and even feel directly what he or she is going through. That sense of closeness is, of course, illusory, since in actuality you are situated in a seat some distance away from the face on the screen, not only in space but also in time. (Just think of the fact that the actor has done this performance not at the present time, before your eyes, as it may seem, but in a different place many weeks, months, or even years before the date at which you view the film. The actor or actress is thus not even “present” to you; only a shade or delegate is.) But the close-up more than anything else in cinema can elicit reactions from you by making you feel that you are up there on the screen, a part of the proceedings, and not there in your seat.

A **zoom**, which is a movement of a long focal lens — not of the camera itself — either in toward an object or out away from that object is a cinematic articulation that you probably have seen many times. It is the refocusing of your eye that you instinctively do when you instantly turn your attention from one thing to another; it registers exactly this kind of sudden turning of attention, as if your very eyes have noticed something and focused in on it, or indeed pulled back from it, and in this way, the zoom imitates the patterns of your mind and your vision. Similarly, the **pan** gets you to turn your neck, so to speak, without moving your head; via the **dolly**, you walk forward, backward, or to the side without leaving your seat, etc. These are the ways by which the camera enlists your attention and your response, and because they seem so “natural” — just the ways in which you are used to seeing in everyday life — you hardly notice that you have been captivated.

A film audience does not want to be conscious of the fact of projection, does not want not to see the screen but rather the magical unfolding of the images, does not want to have to think about the machinery or projection, for that too interferes with its total absorption in and captivation by the film’s fiction. All of these components of the cinema that are effectively obliterated during a screening — the camera, the projector, the screen and even, as we have seen, the spectator him- or herself — taken together are referred to as the **cinematic apparatus**. Cinema counts on making this apparatus unapparent. For if it were apparent, the main illusion on which cinema is based, that of looking in on a private world that unwinds magically, would be spoiled. Thus, the cinema’s means of production are concealed so that the spectator is not aware of the material machinery that constructs the filmic illusion; he or she has the false sense that the story is being told by nobody from nowhere, or even produced by the spectator.

**Application of Film Terms**

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| Materials | * TV/VCR/DVD player * Film clip |
| Purpose | * To demonstrate an understanding of cinematic terms * To practice a close reading strategy and an analysis of film * To examine the cinematic effects of film on the reader |

Steps

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| 1. Ask students to present their collages from the previous activity in small groups and to review the film terms. |
| 1. Next, expose students to the practice of close reading film by showing them short clips that emphasize certain techniques. Students may focus more on camera techniques with the sound turned off. In this first read, direct students to identify a cut from one shot to the next by clapping each time a new shot appears in this short clip. |
| 1. Next, view again (re-read) this same clip, this time with the sound on and ask students to identify as many of the film terms as they can in application. They can use the film terminology list to assist them in this process. |
| 1. Next, write three to five film terms, each from a different category, on an index card. Assign students to groups and give each group a card. Students may role play as director, cameraman, and actors to create a short scenario using the terms on their card. Allow them a specific amount of time to plan and practice using these techniques. Students will then demonstrate the terms from their cards for the class. For example, one group’s card may include the terms dolly tracking, low angle, and bottom lighting. They decide to create a scary scene where the villain sneaks up behind the victim. The “victim” will be sitting in a chair. The “cameraman,” holding his or her paper camera, will walk alongside the “villain,” simulating dolly tracking. When the “villain” reaches the “victim,” the “cameraman” moves to the floor to create the illusion of a low angle. Another student will hold a flashlight underneath the “villain’s” face to create the illusion of bottom lighting. |
| 1. Last, ask students to reflect on this exercise and consider why they made the choices they did in their presentations. In a quickwrite, students should consider the following: What effect did you want to have on your audience? What choices did you make in your direction to achieve your desired effect? |

**Working with Film Terminology Part 2**

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| Materials | * TV/VCR * *Meet Joe Black* * Film view notes |
| Purpose | * To demonstrate an understanding of cinematic terms * To practice a close reading strategy and an analysis of film * To examine the cinematic effects of film on the reader |

Steps

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| 1. Students will participate in a close reading of a short clip from the film *Meet Joe Black*. This clip begins approximately 10 minutes and 47 seconds into the film after Brad Pitt’s character has just met his love interest in a diner. The scene begins immediately after the couple exits the diner. Ask students to view this clip once with the sound off and respond to the text by noting which shots the director uses. Tell students not to ruin the scene for others if they’ve already seen this movie. Using the graphic organizer, students should take notes on this series of shots back and forth between the two characters: |
| Long shots to establish the setting |
| Medium shots to display the body language of the characters |
| Close-up shots to establish the facial expressions of the characters |
| Shot-reverse-shot to establish a conversation between the two characters and the building tension |
| High-key lighting to establish the mood of this scene — light and happy |
| 1. This scene will end abruptly when Brad Pitt’s star-crossed character crosses the street and is hit by a car because he is so pre-occupied with his love interest. Immediately after the character’s death, the film fades to black for approximately seven seconds to give the audience time to respond to the shock of this tragedy. The scene fades slowly back into the next scene. |
| 1. Ask students to generate three questions that they would like to ask the director if he were in the class. Students should share their questions in small groups and predict what the director’s response might be. |

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| 1. Inform students that when the film is read closely, the director gives us several hints of what’s to come in this scene. It is suggested that students now review (re-read) this scene with the sound on. Now that they know what is going to happen, they should examine how the director sets up the viewer (reader) for this event. Again, students’ responses should unveil how the director accomplishes this task by a series of shots but this time should also note what can be observed by the close reader: long shots to establish traffic and medium shots to establish indecision and distraction on behalf of both characters, for example. After this viewing, ask students to take notes and discuss their findings. In a **think-pair-share**, ask students to respond to the following prompts: |
| How does the director use sound (diegetic and non-diegetic) to enhance this scene? |
| Why does the director choose to fade out to a black scene for so long and fade in again slowly? |
| What is the effect of the fade to black on the audience and what did the director do to achieve this effect? |
| 1. Finally, ask students to craft an analytical statement about this scene. You will probably need to assist them in this process by talking them through a review of the reading strategies they have learned and the connections between those reading strategies and the process they used to make meaning from the film. More important, ask students how they came to make meaning of this text (film clip). What strategies did they use while reading this clip? This is a great time to point out to students the relationship between reading print text and non-print text. Both require skills to ascertain meaning. Students’ lists of reading strategies should resemble this one: |
| Making predictions |
| Questioning the text |
| Responding to the text |
| Re-reading |
| Close reading |
| Making inferences |

**Working with Film Terminology Part 2**

Use the graphic organizer to assist you in the note-taking process while viewing the film clip.

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| *Meet Joe Black* | **Observations:** note what you observe in this scene — camera movement, angles, shots, sound, lighting, setting, characters etc. | **Interpretation:** What can a viewer infer based on his or her observations? |
| First viewing without sound | *Example: Shot-reverse-shot between a couple* | *Example: Maybe they are flirting with one another.* |
| Second viewing — sound optional |  |  |
| Final viewing with sound |  |  |

**Working with Film Terminology Part 2**

(continued)

On separate paper, respond to the following prompts:

* How does the director use sound (diegetic and non-diegetic) to enhance this scene?
* Why does the director choose to fade out to a black scene for so long and fade in again slowly?
* What is the effect of the fade on the audience and what did the director do to achieve this effect?
* What strategies did we use today to make meaning from this text?

**Reading Film: Back to the Future Screening Day 1**

Discussion Questions for the Home Base Group Day A

While viewing the key sequence of the text, note the places where you see a particularly interesting example of your assigned cinematic element. You will want to put your notes on a separate sheet of paper.

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| Framing/Angles | Lighting | Camera Movement | Music/Sound | Editing |
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Screenplay Excerpt Final for Back to the Future

Look through the script and find a particularly interesting scene. Come up with a storyboard for this scene on poster-board that I will provide. On the back of the poster-board, answer the following questions and give me the scene of the movie with the dialogue from the script.

Why did you choose the framing, lighting, and music that you did?

What words or phrases from the screenplay made you picture this?

How did the scenes you have already seen in the movie help you make these choices?

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| **SHOT #** | |
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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |
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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |

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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |
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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |

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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |
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| **Describe the Music/Sound:**  **Dialogue:** |
| **Framing\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_** | **Lighting:** |

Questions for the Home Base Group: Day 2

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| Framing/Angles | Lighting | Camera Movement | Music/Sound | Editing |
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While viewing the key sequence of the text, note the places where you see a particularly interesting example of your assigned cinematic element.

Analytical Statement with Textual Support and Reflective Commentary

Robert Zemeckis in *Back to the Future I*, uses \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ in order

*Cinematic element*

to \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

*Achieve what purpose*

For example,\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

*Provide evidence from the text to support the topic sentence.*

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*Reflective commentary*

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*Sentence of closure/summary*