THE VISUAL
GRAMMAR
OF FILM

LESSON PLAN

FUTURESTATES

PRESENTED BY:

cpb   [ITVS]

FUTURESTATES.TV

COMMUNITY CLASSROOM
Independent Television Service (ITVS)
651 Brannan Street, Suite 410
San Francisco, CA 94107
E-mail: outreach@itvs.org
http://www.itvs.org/classroom

COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is an innovative education resource providing short documentary video content and accompanying curricular materials, lesson plans, and homework assignments to high school and community college instructors and youth-serving community-based organizations. Film modules are drawn from documentaries scheduled for broadcast on the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*. Content is grouped into subject specific segments that correspond to lesson plans and educational activities. All COMMUNITY CLASSROOM lesson plans are designed with key education standards in mind, and are available free of charge online, along with the film modules.

COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is a program of the Independent Television Service, created with support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Lesson plans were developed with guidance from the American Association of Community Colleges, KQED Education Network, National Association for Media Literacy Education, National Council for the Social Studies, National State Teachers of the Year, and PBS Teachers.

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Film Terminology
Lesson Plan Overview

Because students often passively consume film and other media, it is essential that you give students an opportunity to examine media critically as they explore these FUTURESTATES films. To become active, analytical viewers, students need to first learn the language of film. This lesson walks students through a few exercises that will give them the terminology to talk about the films from a more critical perspective.

Target Audience
This lesson is designed for high school students of all ability levels.

Total Duration
This lesson should take 1-2 days, depending on the class.

Objective for the Lesson
Students will be able to:
- Identify film terminology and explain the effects of the director's choices.
- Recognize the cinematic and theatrical elements in film.
- Understand how filmmakers use cinematic and theatrical elements for particular effects.

Teacher Preparation
- Have access to the FUTURESTATES site and a projector with sound.

Procedures Part One (Cinematic Elements)

1. Begin by asking students to complete the Film 101 survey, which asks them about their interests in film. Then, ask them to complete the Media Habits survey, which asks them about their use of "new media technologies." Be sure that they have some time to write and discuss with a partner what they have learned about themselves.

2. Instruct students to roll a sheet of construction paper into a tube and hold it up to their eye like a telescope. After students have completed this task, ask them to manipulate the paper camera as if it were a real camera. For example, ask a volunteer to stand in front of the class to be the subject of the students' frame:
   - To get a long shot, students will have to unroll the paper to create a larger lens in order to get a shot of the student's full body. Ask them what this shot enables the viewer to see.
   - Next, ask students to decrease the size of the lens on the paper camera to get a medium shot (from the waist up). Ask students to consider why a director might choose to use this shot. Further, what does this shot unveil to the viewer?
   - Next, ask students to decrease the size of the lens of the camera to get a close up shot (capturing only the face). Ask students to consider why a director might use this shot.
   - Finally, ask students to roll their paper camera tighter in an effort to zoom into an extreme close up (focusing on one specific aspect, for example an eye or ear). Again, ask students why a director might choose this shot.
   - The paper camera can be adjusted to create many different shots, angles, and camera movements. For example, a pan may be demonstrated by turning your head from left to right, and a low angle may be demonstrated by sitting on the floor and "filming" a clock up on the wall.
   - There are many other movements that you could direct students to try in order to give them a conceptual understanding of how to apply cinematic terminology. As you expose students to these terms, ask them why these shots, angles, and movements might be used. Engage students in a discussion about the similarities between a literary author's decisions and a film director's choices.

3. Now, hand out the Film Terminology sheet and ask students to read through the document, marking any questions or examples they have.

4. Play either the trailer for or the opening segment (the first 90 seconds) of *Play* and ask students to identify the use of as many film effects as possible. Remember, it is not enough to ask them to only identify the effect – they must learn to explain its function. Always prompt your students to follow up by asking, "Why do you think the director used that?" or "How would it have been different if the director used …?"

5. Replay the clip and ask students to identify the use of any film terms they see, using the cinematic elements note taking sheet. Show students a second clip, perhaps the trailer for *Fallout*, and ask them to focus on one or more of the elements on the note taking form. Note: students should NOT be asked to take notes on ALL the elements at first; it is a skill they will develop. In the meantime, assign an individual element to each student or assign students to work in groups.

Procedures Part Two (Theatrical Elements)

Teacher Notes: When watching film, it is essential that students look at more than just the cinematic elements (shot type, angle, lighting, etc.) discussed in the previous part. Film is also made up of theatrical elements (costumes, props, sets, acting, etc.), which students also need to learn to examine.

1. Select at least two clips from the films identified below:

- FUTURSTATES clips: The opening two minutes of *The Rise* or *Silver Sling*. The trailer for any of the films from the FUTURESTATES site would also work well.

- Others films:
    o The opening scene from *Life is Beautiful.*
    o The opening scene from *Chocolat.*
    o When Cyrano tries to tell Roxanne he loves her at the bakery (about 20 minutes in) in the film *Cyrano de Bergerac.*
    o Just about any scene from *Moulin Rouge.*
    o The scene from *Chicago* where the lawyer and Roxie have their press conference.
    o The scene in *Whale Rider* where Paikea looks in on the boys training (about 35 minutes into the film).

As students watch each clip, ask them to write down what they notice about the costumes, props, sets, and acting choices on the theatrical elements note taking form. Note that acting can include movement, gestures, voices, etc.

2. After viewing the film clips, students should write a paragraph with a strong topic sentence that explains the effect of one or more of those theatrical elements. The way to get students to respond well is to ask them, "Why did the director use ...?"

3. Before looking at one of the films from the FUTURESTATES site in its entirety, it might be a good idea to practice with the combined theatrical and cinematic note taking form while viewing one of the clips already examined.

Film 101 Survey

1. Approximately how many movies do you watch a month (DVD, cable, online, or in the 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 kinds 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, in a theater, and watching online?

7. What kinds of movies do you watch in school?

8. What do teachers normally ask you to during or after watching a movie in school?

9. Have you or someone you know ever created and shared films with others? What do you think is involved in the filmmaking process?

Media Habits Survey

Use the following scale to identify how often you partipate in the following:

Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
4	3	2	1

_____   Play videogames

_____   Play interactive videogames with other people online, such as *World of Warcraft* or similar role playing games

_____   Use Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, or similar social networking sites

_____   Keep a blog

_____   Share music online

_____   Use the internet for research

_____   Watch TV shows and movies online on sites such as Hulu

_____   Watch videos on YouTube or similar video sharing sites

_____   Create and share your own videos

_____   Look online for current news and/or sports information

_____   Send e-mails

_____   Send texts

Write for a few minutes about your own media viewing and creating habits. How are you similar or different from your parents/guardians in your use of media? How has your use of media changed as you've grown older?

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 the 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 all shots are taken at 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 the 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 lens is adjusted to make an object seem to move closer to or further away from the camera. With this technique, moving toward a character often preceeds 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.

Film Terminology (cont.)

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: The most common editing technique. Two pieces of film are spliced together so that the film "cuts" from one image to another.

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: Cuts between actions that are 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.

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Film Viewing Note Taking Form: Cinematic Elements

Title of Film: _____   **Director:** _____

Shot Types	Angles	Camera Movement
Ligthing	**Sound**	**Editing**

General Response

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Film Viewing Note Taking Form: Theatrical Elements

Title of Film:_____ **Names of Characters:** _____

Costumes/Makeup	Props/Sets	Acting Choices

Title of Film:_____ **Names of Characters:** _____

Costumes/Makeup	Props/Sets	Acting Choices

Title of Film:_____ **Names of Characters:** _____

Costumes/Makeup	Props/Sets	Acting Choices

[C]

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Film Viewing Note Taking Form: Theatrical and Cinematic Elements

Title of Film: _____   **Director:** _____

CINEMATIC Shot type, angle, lighting, sound, etc.	THEATRICAL Costumes, props, sets, acting, etc.

General Response

[C]

LESSON PLAN CREDITS

CURRICULA WRITER

John Golden

John Golden is currently a curriculum specialist for high school Language Arts in Portland, Oregon. He is the author of *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* (NCTE, 2001) and *Reading in the Reel World: Teaching Documentaries and Other Nonfiction Texts* (NCTE, 2006). John has delivered presentations and led workshops around the country in order to help teachers use film actively in the classroom as a way for students to improve their reading, analytical and critical thinking skills.

CONTENT MANAGER

Annelise Wunderlich
ITVS

CURRICULUM ADVISORS

Jenny Bradbury
PBS Teachers

Kara Clayton
National Association for Media Literacy Education

Joseph Fatheree
National State Teachers of the Year

John Golden
National Council of Teachers of English

Matthew Lappé
Alliance for Climate Education

LESSON PLAN DESIGN AND LAYOUT

Wilson Ling
ITVS

EDITORIAL REVIEW

Luke Sykora
ITVS

About FUTURESTATES:

Imagining tomorrow's America today, FUTURESTATES is a series of independent mini-features — short narrative films created by experienced filmmakers and emerging talents transforming today's complex social issues into visions about what life in America will be like in decades to come. The first season of FUTURESTATES debuted in March 2010, and is available online at futurestates.tv.

About ITVS:

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.