

ENHANCING PRIMARY LITERACY LEARNING THROUGH THE USE OF FILM

A case study of the Bradford Film
Literacy project and its findings

By Dr Franziska Florack

FOREWORD

Into Film is delighted to bring the findings of Franzi Florack's PhD to a wider public. As an education charity that seeks to put film at the heart of children and young people's educational, cultural and personal development Franzi's PhD speaks to our mission and shines a light on one of the areas in which film can have a significant impact. Since more than half of UK schools engage with our programme of Into Film Clubs, special cinema screenings, resources and training to support classroom teaching and rich online content for young audiences, we would expect many educators to be interested in this pamphlet.

Into Film became aware of Dr Florack's important piece of work in 2014 and we have awaited the final publication with interest. The findings presented here are one of the first reports that pins its colours to the mast when attributing raised attainment in literacy to a film intervention.

Into Film has itself undertaken three research projects (The Welsh Media Literacy Project, Full STEAM Ahead Years 1 and 2 and Film For Learning) all of which have supported Dr Florack's findings that the use of film for literacy teaching and learning has a profound effect on pupil motivation and their attainment in reading and writing.

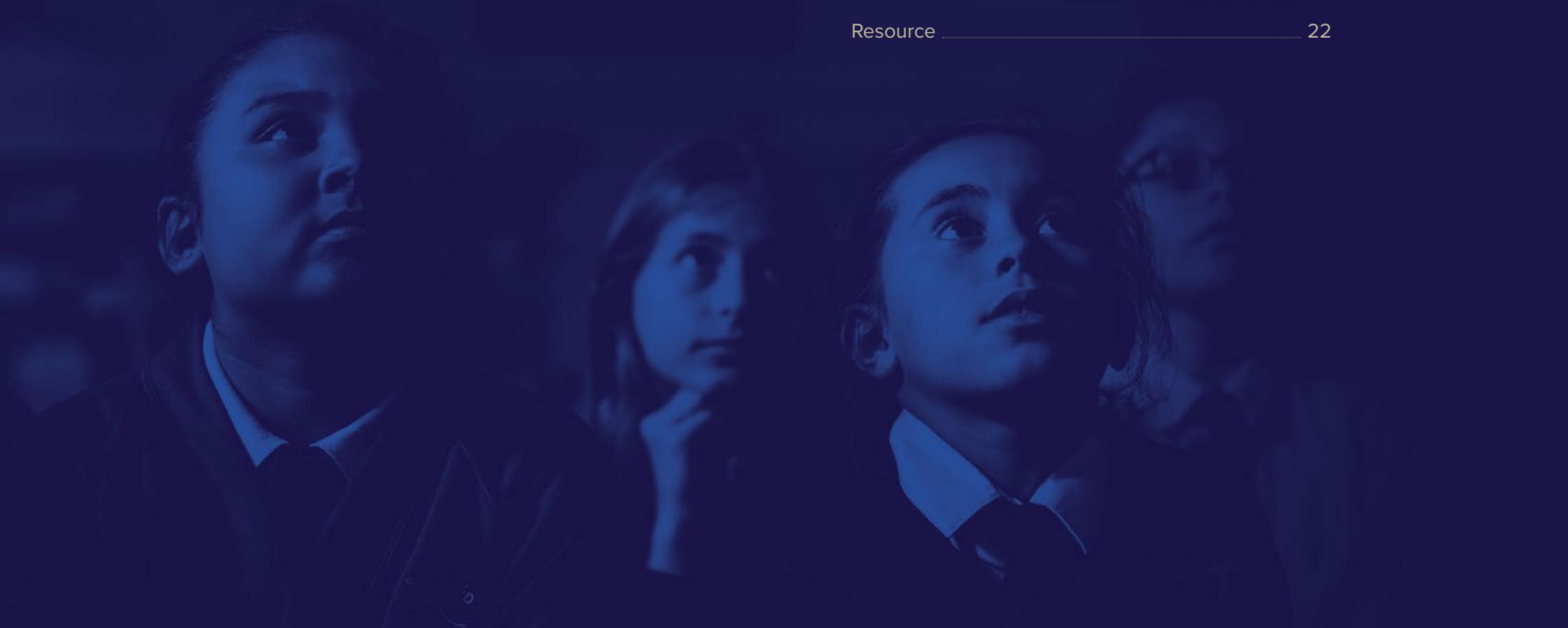
Being literate in the broadest sense of the word is an essential skill that everyone needs to succeed in the world, and the ability to understand, use and create moving image is of fundamental importance for teachers and their pupils, both in providing an accessible point of entry and leveling the playing field for all pupils, and for equipping young people with the skills they need for 21st century life. The need for digital literacy skills (information, technology and media literacy) and 21st century literacy skills such as working with others, thinking critically, problem-solving, decision-making and enterprise have never been more important both in education and the world of work.

Film is an inspirational visual medium with which young people instinctively connect from an early age. When used for literacy teaching and learning, film provides a 'route in' to literacy and can be used to inspire and excite pupils whilst teaching skills of deduction, inference, analysis, recall, speaking and listening that are equally transferable to traditional literacy learning. We hope that this pamphlet enriches readers knowledge and piques interest in this a key building block and rationale for Into Film's and more broadly education's commitment to education about and with film.

Into Film

Into Film is a not-for-profit organisation supported principally by the BFI (through the National Lottery), Cinema First and Northern Ireland Screen Our mission is to inspire dynamic ways of learning with film and connecting with cinema that reach the widest possible young audience across the UK. Our vision is that film is at the heart of every child and young person's life and learning.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite a constant rise in the attainment of SATS results year on year, the perception remains that British primary school children are underachieving and that they are reluctant readers and writers. The extensive case study is concerned with KS2 Primary school teachers who, in order to motivate their students, used film as a visual stimulus to provide students with ideas and create a personal and emotion connection with the written text. This case study examines the positive impact of the use of film on children's engagement and attainment in primary literacy lessons.

In the school years of 2013/14, Dr Franziska Florack followed 22 primary classes which were taking part in a 'film literacy' scheme run by Bradford UNESCO City of Film. This initiative saw the training of teachers in the use of film as a tool in literacy lesson with the aim of raising attainment and motivation. Students and teachers completed questionnaires and interviews which were analysed in conjunction with observations and the students' literacy grades.

The research showed that both students and teachers recorded an increase in motivation. Further, significant progress in attainment also became evident: film literacy students raised their grades by 23.3% beyond the expected year-on-year increase. Improvements in inference, comprehension and vocabulary were especially praised by teachers. Students from schools with a low-income environment benefitted in particular. One of the possible reasons for this special advantage is film's ability to provide children with a visual starting point for their writing exercises.

This report discusses the potential reasons for these changes and makes recommendations for teachers, schools and parents on how best to use film in the primary literacy classroom to raise standards and engage reluctant young literacy learners.

INTRODUCTION

In the school year of 2011/12, Bradford, the world's first UNESCO City of Film, began the country's first extended 'film literacy' initiative, a course which would train over 50 primary school teachers in the use of film for literacy lessons. Challenged by low attainment and, in particular, unmotivated boys, it was hoped that the introduction of film to primary school classrooms would engage students and teachers alike. Specialist education consultants from the local Innovation Centre were hired to lead and support teachers in their use of audiovisual resources.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that the first year of the scheme had been a success and in the summer of 2012 a second and then a third year of the project were commissioned. By 2013 it had become clear that although positive data seemed to emerge from the project both in terms of grades as well as teachers' impression of the student's motivation, there was no coherent and objective evidence of the impact which was so clearly visible to the team and teachers. A PhD was commissioned which would assess the project's results on motivation and attainment.

This is the first long-term, mixed method study on the use of film in classrooms. It is based on an extensive literature review within the context of film, education and psychology. The use of film in education is a topic which has not been researched extensively and evidence of positive impact had previously demonstrated a tendency toward the anecdotal. Although much good practice can be witnessed in schools, with teachers recording that pupils were more 'motivated' when film clips were used or that selected grades had risen, previous funded projects using film as a stimulus had relied heavily on interview data, and before this study, there had been few longitudinal studies overseen by a trained researcher.

Students' love of film has been well documented and becomes especially evident in box office successes and high viewing figures of children's film and other media. While it seems common sense that students enjoy watching films and talking about them, their relationship with writing is less clear¹. An very limited number of studies have investigated how children feel about learning to write in schools and although there is some evidence that boys and girls prefer different genres of writing², the topic remains very complex and is often connected to exam pressure and anxiety³. Thus this particular study which would specifically look at motivation AND attainment would prove useful for schools and students alike.

The following report will give an overview of the Bradford Film Literacy project and the findings of Dr Florack's PhD. The full thesis is available in the British Library (autumn 2018) and further academic and non-academic articles about it will be published over the coming years.

1. Barbeiro, "What Happens When I Write?"; Holmes, "What Do Students Mean When They Say, 'I Hate Writing?'"

2. Browne, *Helping Children to Write*; Maynard, *Boys and Literacy*; Senn, "Effective Approaches to Motivate and Engage Reluctant Boys in Literacy."

3. Loveys, "Dropping One Grade 'Can Blight Pupil's Life'"; Paton, "Exam Textbooks Promote Culture of 'Teaching to the Test'"; Richardson, "11-plus Coaching Culture 'Must End.'"

CASE STUDY

Film's position in the curriculum has changed substantially over the past 100 years. One of the main questions which teachers, school leaders and policy makers have asked themselves since the first use of film in a classroom is whether film 'should [...] be extracurricular, or [whether it] should it be an entitlement and as thus embedded in the curriculum'⁴. In the Bradford Film Literacy Project, film was used both as a tool (to aid writing activities and foster traditional literacy) and as a focus in itself. Students watched films, read and wrote about them, made films and used it in a wide variety of further ways.

4. British Film Institute, "Advocacy Feedback Sessions," 12.

All teachers on the scheme were trained by special media consultants during three development days and many of the practitioners then created and extended their own materials. Most of their lesson planning followed the structure of getting to know the medium of film, followed by formal text production and more creative activities.

In one school, for example, the teacher used films in two different ways: first as part of an introductory section and then as part of an overarching theme (myths). The aim of the introductory unit, centred around *The Girl and the Fox* (2011) was to make students feel more comfortable with the medium of film and to teach ways in which resources would be used as part of the myth unit. The class started by writing paragraphs, re-counting the narrative of the story, and then they added dialogue to the silent film. These activities were largely based on re-counting, rather than original production.



The Girl and the Fox
Property of Tyler Kupferer © (2011)
(girlandthefox.com) All rights reserved.

Secondly, as part of the myth unit, the teacher first engaged in guided reading and then students wrote their own myths. Once the writing was completed, the students storyboarded their own myths and wrote a scene in details as a full script as part of a group. The teacher felt that this activity really benefitted the students' discussion skills. The scene-setting was followed by filming and then blog entries about the filming experience, thus coming full circle on the writing experience.

Bradford has a rich heritage of moving image innovation and filmmaking progress. An indigenous film history which can be traced back to the First World War as well as the country's National Media Museum have contributed to the city's identity and culture. In 2009, Bradford was awarded the world's first UNESCO 'City of Film' designation which recognised its past heritage and current engagement with film. Currently, Bradford continues to improve its position in the national film community by acting as locations for films such as *The King's Speech*⁵ and as the host to the Bradford Family Film Festival.

5. Hooper, *The King's Speech*.

A group of 26 diverse schools agreed to join the City of Film Literacy Scheme in July 2013 and 20 of these decided to take part in the research. Overall, the 20 schools had a lower than average number of students with SEN statements, but a higher than average number of pupils who were EAL learners and students eligible for free school meals. 515 children between Year 4 and Year 6 were part of the intervention group (who were on the film literacy scheme) and 91 provided control group data to compare the results to non-film literacy students. 21 teachers joined the scheme in 2013, with two schools registering two teachers. Four teachers had been part of the film literacy scheme before and now acted as 'cluster mentors' where they helped other teachers with their activities.

The aim of the research was to find out whether film had the potential to motivate students in the literacy classroom and whether it could impact positively on attainment in writing in particular. Data about the students' progress over the academic year was gathered from a variety of sources. Teachers completed two questionnaires: one at the beginning of the year and one in spring. Each questionnaire charted their feelings about the scheme in general and about the progress they felt their students were making. Interviews were also conducted with teachers at the end of the year, and lessons and training days run by the Innovation Centre were also observed as part of the research process.

Two different groups of children were included in the study: Firstly, all children who were part of the film literacy classes filled in two different questionnaires, at the beginning and at the end of the year. These tried to understand their feelings about writing and about using film in the classroom. In addition, their writing scores, as assessed by the teachers, were made available to me. Secondly, the same data gathering took place in a range of control classes from the same schools, with the exception of the 'film' questionnaires which were not distributed.



FINDINGS

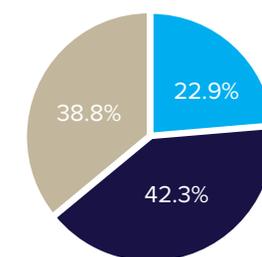
Positive changes had already been recorded in the previous year of the film literacy scheme (2012/13), however these were based largely on anecdotal evidence. Teacher's feedback had been overwhelmingly positive and the benefits mentioned included increase in enthusiasm, reading, empathy, interest, concentration, processing and demonstrating information, appreciation of genres, imagination, vocabulary, writing, motivation, attitude, engagement and team building skills.

After investigating any potential change thoroughly in 2013/14, the research found that both teachers and students felt that this increase in motivation was very real for them: Students were more excited about lessons, made more of an effort and were involved in the events in the classroom. And this change seemed to benefit both parties, too: teachers were delighted that their students were motivated and the majority of the questioned film literacy students preferred film lessons to other lessons.

Both students and teachers believed that attainment had risen due to the use of film. Teachers were satisfied with the quality and quantity of the work the students had produced during the film literacy lessons and the majority of teachers felt that the scheme was having a positive impact on their students, particularly in writing. One Year 5 teacher mentioned that 'they've become much more confident writers, really, since we've started doing the film.' This feeling was mirrored by other teachers throughout the interviews.

Students also had a positive perception of the scheme in terms of their attainment in writing. 53.7% felt that they wrote better in film lessons. In Year 5 particularly, students were more likely to think that they wrote better with film. In all classes, 48.4% felt that they achieve better grades in film lessons and 53.7% felt that they wrote more in film lessons.

Although these results seem modest in comparison to the positive comments of the teachers, they are reinforced by an increase in grades. Overall, students' progress showed a mean of 3.73, which is significantly above the expected 3 points. Of these students, 22.9% performed below expectations, 42.3% performed as expected and 38.8% performed higher than expected.



PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS

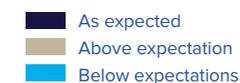


Figure 1 Literacy performance of students

At the end of Year 6/ Key Stage 2, students had achieved a mean points score of 24.4, higher than the minimum expected 19 points. 90% of students had achieved the required level 4 (compared to the national 74%) and 50% had achieved a level 5 (compared to the national 48%). In Year 4, only 10.6% of students made less than expected progress.

Improvement was particularly noticeable amongst students who were either going to a school with traditionally poorer results or who were performing below-average at the beginning of the year. The majority of students in 'good' or 'requires improvement' schools made more than expected progress. In the 'requires improvement' schools in particular, only 17.5% of students made less than the expected progress set by the government. In the 'outstanding' 43.3% of students made more than expected progress.

Students who were working below the nationally expected level were more likely to make more progress than expected compared to those who were at or above target level (62% vs 52.5%). However, overall the majority of students from all groups made more progress than expected.

All of these data sets point towards a particular benefit for students who struggle with literacy. One Year 4 teacher felt that film had especially helped low-achieving students with their reading: 'The ones that seem to have done better, and improved their reading, not so much their writing, but definitely their reading, are the ones who have found the reading more difficult at the start of the year.'

Although teachers were keen to mention students who struggled with their reading and writing as the primary beneficiaries of the scheme, it seems that the benefits do not necessarily exclude children who are working at or above their expected standard: 'I mean, mainly my target group looked at the [gifted and talented] children, and most of them made at least four points, if not five or six points in writing. So they've done fantastic. And I think it shows that the high flyers really can accelerate progress with this, as well as the under achieving children. So I've chosen my under achieving ones last year. [...] And they again did really well.' (Year 4 teacher)

This variety of student groups who had done particularly well ranges from children with more complex learning needs to the above gifted and talented children. Three specific areas of literacy improvement were mentioned throughout the study: Inference skills, comprehension and vocabulary. In conclusion, it seems fair to say that while different teachers felt that different groups benefitted, overall, all teachers agreed that film helped all their students.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research shows that after a year of film literacy lessons students felt more confident, enjoyed the literacy lessons more and achieved better results in comparison to their previous grades, the national average and the government's expectation of progress. Students reacted very excitedly to the introduction of film to their lessons, and felt at ease with recounting writing activities, which then aided the more creative writing and film makings tasks.

The Film Literacy teachers enjoyed working with the film resources and were delighted by students' progress. Teachers also praised the film resources and in particular liked that they were able to cover lots of different areas of the literacy curriculum via the same resources, which were instantly accessible by all of the students.

In the full thesis, five possible reasons are mentioned for the students' increase in engagement and attainment:

1. Students connect positive emotions to film and then transfer this to literacy
2. Film fosters emotional literacy
3. Film facilitates activities which involve personal opinion
4. Students are able to access moving images better than written texts
5. Visual stimulation 'plugs gaps' in life experience

The first three categories draw on emotional engagement and literacy. Students are invested in film and want to share their enthusiasm for and thoughts about moving images.

Children's interaction with film goes beyond the watching of the text: They love to 'play' as the characters of films⁶, imagine and transfer (alternative) film scenarios⁷, build communities around film memorabilia⁸ and generally integrate morals and character traits into their personal lives. In this way, children's love for film is more holistic and all-encompassing than love for other popular media such as comic books and radio: film has an ability to permeate into children's social lives and their imagination. It has the potential to impact on the way that they perceive the world and the development of their own character traits.

It is this reported love for the medium that teachers found particularly useful for their lesson planning. They felt that enthusiasm and personal opinion gave the students natural reasons to express themselves: 'It's just nice seeing the kids enjoy it – enjoy writing, because they're enthused about the film. [...] Whereas before the scheme, I think there were like "oh literacy is boring." Whereas they don't think that now.' (Year 4 teacher)

6. Marsh, "Popular Culture, New Media and Digital Literacy in Early Childhood."

7. Fry, *Children Talk about Books: Seeing Themselves as Readers*.

8. Dyson, "The Brothers and Sister Learn to Write: Popular Literacy."

9. Carrington, "New Textual Landscapes, Information, New Childhood."

It is the recommendation of the researcher that teachers should use the idea of moving images to spark children's enthusiasm. Using different film clips as lesson starters, or designing writing activities based on film as a stimulus is likely to engage young people's positive association with film, which will then be transferred to the exercise itself. Film is an enjoyable and engaging part of children's social, cultural and personal lives⁹. Acknowledging its importance and utilising it in the literacy classroom does not only confirm to children that their culture, personality and interests are taken seriously, it also has the potential to transform literacy teaching and learning.

Film also seemed to create a starting point to a project or lesson which enabled all students to access resources equally. Many teachers mentioned that film offered students a way to 'experience' unknown scenarios through the films. They spoke about their students' limited life experience and that stimulating them visually often prevented the mental block of not knowing where to start. Further, a group of teachers explained how film allowed their students to access information they would have otherwise had to gather from written texts.

As a further recommendation, we encourage teachers and school leaders in areas of deprivation to see the use of film as an opportunity to engage young people who grow up with more limited life experiences. Film has the ability to engage learners from all backgrounds and seems to be accessible in a way that written texts often are not.

If you are a teacher and would like to make a start on planning your own film lessons, use the Into Film activity sheet at the back of this booklet after watching a short film with your students. The resource has been created to facilitate dialogue about film and you can use many of the analysis questions independently as part of your lessons.

Into Film also have a presentation on the use of film for literacy on their website, which explains the different analysis areas in detail (www.intofilm.org/film-for-learning). We are sure that your students will enjoy the media resources and would be delighted to hear your own success stories!



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RESOURCE

If you've been inspired by what you've read and seen, try our exclusive tool to highlight the 3Cs (Camera, Colour, Character) and 3Ss (Story, Setting, Sound). Use this to improve your pupils' speaking and listening, analytical and deconstruction capabilities.

You can use this tool with any film or moving image. The tool consists of a dice template and a series of questions (feel free as you grow in confidence to add your own). To use this tool, just screen any film or moving image content, pause at an appropriate moment, roll the dice and ask your pupils to answer a question from the appropriate C or S category, linked to where the dice has fallen.

This super-fun tool gets pupils excited, involved - many teachers report pupils' who were previously reticent about speaking out becoming fully engaged. Do let us know how you get on by emailing info@intofilm.org.

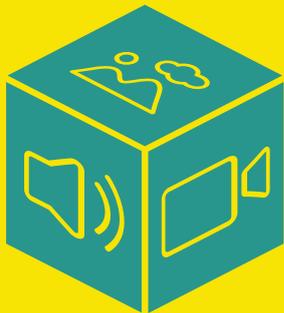
INTO FILM

The 3Cs and 3Ss Resource

The 3Cs (Colour, Camera, Character) and the 3Ss, (Story, Setting, Sound) can be used to help students discuss and analyse all the elements of a film text.

To use

After viewing a film or film sequence, just roll the dice and ask your students the corresponding questions overleaf.



Free resources for teachers, TAs, community, youth group and library staff.

Into Film has hundreds of easy-to-use resources featuring lesson and activity ideas, films clips and behind-the-scenes footage.

There are resources for use in film clubs and for use in the curricula of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. www.intofilm.org/resources

Free and low-cost training for teachers and community educators working with 5-19 year olds.

Into Film offers high quality CPD training for groups or individual educators. Our courses will help you to develop your pupils' literacy skills through exciting and engaging activities that use film as text. Our curricular filmmaking training brings any topic to life for pupils and aims to raise pupil attainment across the curriculum.

View the full range of courses on offer here: www.intofilm.org/training

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Every teacher should learn how to use film in the classroom!

ALEX, TEACHER, KAIMHILL SCHOOL

99

Free Into Film Clubs for schools, youth and community groups and libraries.

Into Film Clubs provides children and young people a space to watch, discuss and review films, as well as the training and resources to make their own. Our Into Film Clubs can be set up for free in state-funded schools and non-school settings such as youth clubs, cinemas and libraries. As well as access to thousands of fantastic films to watch, Into Film Clubs are offered opportunities in filmmaking, supporting the development of young peoples' voices. Through participating in an Into Film Club, children and young people can also take advantage of opportunities to engage directly with members of the film industry, discover career opportunities and learn how to pursue them.

Contact cpd@intofilm.org to arrange training for you, your school or organisation.

Into Film's Literacy CPD Programme has been developed in close collaboration with a range of partners including the BFI, the Bradford Literacy Group, a wide variety of subject associations and our growing network of CPD practitioners.

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COLOUR

- What colours do you see?
- How do the colours make you feel?
- When do the colours change and why?
- What do the colours tell you about the time of day that the story took place?
- Why do you think certain colours are used?
- What colours would you have chosen?
- Do the colours change when the story is in a different setting?
- Are any colours associated with particular characters?
- How important do you think the colours are in the film?
- What would the film have been like in black and white or in just one colour?
- What mood do you think the colours create?



STORY

- What happens in the beginning, middle and at the end of the story?
- What are the most important things (events) that happen in the story?
- How would the story change if events happened in a different order?
- How do we know where the story takes place?
- Who or what is the story about?
- How can we tell?
- How long does the story take in 'real' time?
- What do you think happened before the story began?
- What might happen next, after the end of the story?
- How does this story remind you of other stories?
- How would you like the story to continue?



CHARACTER

- Is there a main character?
- Is there more than one main character?
- Is the story really about this character or about someone else?
- Who is telling the story?
- What do the main characters look like?
- What might the way they look like tell us about them as a character?
- How do they speak and what do they say?
- How do they behave?
- How do they behave towards other characters?
- Do any of the characters have particular music or sounds?
- Which character interests you the most?
- Is there anyone else you would like to see in the story?
- How would the story be different with another character added or taken away?



SETTING

- Where does the action take place?
- Why is the story set in a particular place?
- When and how does the setting change?
- How does the setting affect the characters and the way they behave?
- When the story began, where did you think we were?
- How could you tell where the story was taking place?
- Could the same story have happened in a different place?
- How do you think the story would have changed if it had happened in a different place or setting?
- Can you tell when the story is taking place?
- What clues might there be to tell us whether the story is set now or in the past?



CAMERA

- What shots have been used? Can you name them?
- When do you see a long shot or a close-up shot?
- What are the different shots used for?
- Through whose eyes do we see the story?
- When do we see different characters' point of view?
- When does the camera move and when does it stay still?
- How does the camera help to tell the story?
- What do the first shots tell us about the story, the setting etc?
- Why do certain shots follow each other e.g. a long shot followed by a close-up?
- How can you tell what the characters are thinking or how they are feeling through what the camera does?
- How quickly do the shots change? Does this change in different parts of the story?



SOUND

- How many different sounds do you hear? What are they?
- Is there music in the film?
- How does the music make you feel?
- When do you hear the music or sounds change?
- What is happening on screen when the sounds or music change?
- If you listen to the sounds without the pictures, can you tell what is happening on the screen?
- Are there any moments of silence?
- Do any of the characters speak? What do they sound like?
- If you added your own voiceover to the film, who would speak and what would they say?
- Can you hear any sound effects?
- Do you think any sounds have been made louder than they would be in real life? What are they? Why do you think they are louder in the film?

Cut-out 3Cs & 3Ss dice



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