

And, Action!

Formal Analysis of Film/Moving Images

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Grade Level	11th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	220 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts		

Essential Question

How do the formal choices made by directors enhance the meaning of their films/moving pictures?

Summary

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the basic terminology for understanding film language. Students will watch various film clips, discuss them, create their own storyboards, and ultimately use the new vocabulary to analyze how they contribute to the meaning of a short scene.

Snapshot

Engage

Students discuss what they love about their favorite movies with an Elbow Partner.

Explore

Students organize a Card Sort to identify and classify advanced film vocabulary.

Explain

Students observe demonstrations and then analyze how to apply film language to explain various short film scenes beyond the narrative aspect.

Extend

Students create a Cognitive Comic to apply key formal elements of film language to convey a specific scenario.

Evaluate

Students watch a film clip repeatedly and use a Choice Board to synthesize their new vocabulary, evaluate a chosen scene, and write a formal analysis, considering directorial decisions and film language.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards for English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.3.R.1: Students will analyze the extent to which historical, cultural, and/or global perspectives affect authors' stylistic and organizational choices in grade-level literary and informational genres.
12.3.R.2: Students will evaluate points of view and perspectives in more than one grade-level literary and/or informational text and explain how multiple points of view contribute to the meaning of a work.
12.3.R.6: Students will comparatively analyze the structures of texts (e.g., compare/contrast, problem/solution, cause/effect, claims/counterclaims/evidence) and content by inferring connections among multiple texts and providing textual evidence to support their conclusions.
12.3.R.7: Students will make connections (e.g., thematic links, literary analysis, authors' style) between and across multiple texts and provide textual evidence to support their inferences.

Attachments

- 3-2-1—And, Action! - Spanish.docx
- 3-2-1—And, Action! - Spanish.pdf
- 3-2-1—And, Action!.docx
- 3-2-1—And, Action!.pdf
- Card Sort—And, Action! - Spanish.docx
- Card Sort—And, Action! - Spanish.pdf
- Card Sort—And, Action!.docx
- Card Sort—And, Action!.pdf
- Choice Board—And, Action! - Spanish.docx
- Choice Board—And, Action! - Spanish.pdf
- Choice Board—And, Action!.docx
- Choice Board—And, Action!.pdf
- Cognitive Comic—And Action! - Spanish.docx
- Cognitive Comic—And Action! - Spanish.pdf
- Cognitive Comic—And Action!.docx
- Cognitive Comic—And Action!.pdf
- Lesson Slides—And, Action!.pptx

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Card Sort (attached; one per group)
- Cognitive Comics (attached; one per student)
- 3-2-1 (attached; half sheet per student)
- Choice Board (attached; one per student)
- Clapperboard (optional)

20 minutes

Engage

Display **slide 2** of the attached **Lesson Slides** as students enter the classroom. To begin the lesson, provide students with the prompt: “What is your favorite movie and why?” If they can’t name a movie, prompt them to pick a favorite genre.

Students discuss their favorite films with Elbow Partners and then share out to the class. Ask students to include a favorite scene and what makes that scene special.

Teacher's Note

This activity encourages students to think about films they enjoy for personal or narrative reasons.

35 minutes

Explore

Transition to **slide 3** and distribute the **Card Sort**. Students will use the Card Sort strategy. Divide the class into small groups and pass out the words and definitions to each group and read the instructions; first, students will match words and definitions for the first round of this activity. Then, they will sort words into one of four categories. Finally, students will name the categories.

Students can self-check their answers with a neighbor group before checking together as an entire class; then, use **slide 4** to check answers with students. If there's time, you might ask "What other categories not mentioned here make up a film?" Answers might include *sound, lighting, music, acting styles, or film medium (digital/tape/celluloid)*.

Teacher's Note

The answers to the first card sort are included in the slide notes.

Move to **slide 5** and introduce the lesson title and concept to students.

Display **slide 6** and briefly go over the essential questions.

Move to **slide** 7 and introduce the lesson objectives.

Teacher's Note

The Card Sort activity encourages students to see how the definitions correspond to easily identifiable vocabulary words. Sorting these definitions into categories demonstrates the variety of different formal features that go into producing moving pictures and what can be analyzed when viewing them.

45 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 8** and play the "K20 ICAP - Storytelling in Focus: Getting the Right Shot in Creative Media with Scott Hodgson" video.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=DRJvd-JhSQw?si=kKyneKh50WHClh-B

Distribute 3-2-1 reflection sheets to students. After the video, instruct students to use the 3-2-1 sheets to reflect on and make connections with the video.

Move to **slide 9**. Play the video "Where Do You Put the Camera?"

Display **slide 10** and play the clip on the slide. If you feel comfortable, replay the clip, pausing at moments where you see important directorial choices. Try to explain how these choices relate to the overall meaning of the scene. There are notes discussing some important moments in the slide notes.

Display **Slide 11** and play the clip on the slide. Play it again after instructing the students to pay attention to how the director chooses to construct each frame. Start the clip over and pause on the first frame (or you can ask students to yell "Cut!" on a frame they want to discuss). Ask them what they notice in terms of how the shot is composed; follow up by asking why they think the director made that choice and what it tells us about the scene/characters. Resume the clip, pausing each time there is a cut, and ask the same question until students have demonstrated that they are getting comfortable with the activity.

Teacher's Note

It is helpful to model the activity before students begin working independently, so they understand expectations and choose descriptive rather than generic examples. To build confidence in leading this kind of exercise, please reference the many available reference videos about formal visual analysis online.

You may also want to post the clips in your digital classroom, so students can watch them multiple times on their own.

45 minutes

Extend

Move to **Slide 12**. Explain to students that the next slides are examples of storyboards and the final shots from different filmmakers. This is how many filmmakers decide how to shoot a scene before filmmaking begins.

Show **slides 13-16**.

Move to **Slide 17**. Hand out a blank cognitive comics strip to each student. Explain to students that they will be creating a storyboard for the scene described on the slide using the Cognitive Comics strategy. They do not need to include everything in their storyboard, but they should include enough shots to fully realize the scene (4 panels minimum). Each square should represent one shot in the sequence. Remind them that they should pick a camera angle that best represents the mood of the shot as well as to include elements of mise-en-scene (“meez-ahn-sin”) that would flesh out the character or emphasize important details about the plot point they are filming.

Teacher's Note

The Cognitive Comics exercise shows how many different ways a simple prompt can be interpreted. This should emphasize how many choices a director has to make about how to best express their vision of a given scene.

60 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 18.** Have students watch the “Paperman” short film once without taking any notes.

After their first viewing, let students know that they are going to perform a formal analysis of the film short on their own. Distribute the Choice Board handout. Tell the students they are going to rewatch the short video and make a note about three formal elements on the Choice Board that they see while watching; tell them to take short notes, just keywords they will need to remember the shot. Then (you can replay the film on silent to the class while they write) have them create a summary on the blank lines at the bottom of the page that explains these directorial choices.

After students have had time to complete their formal analysis, transition to **slide 19**. As an exit ticket, students will use the Two Stars and a Wish strategy to reflect on what they have learned about film language.

Teacher's Note

Students will apply what they have learned in this section. They will combine their understanding of the vocabulary by noticing significant formal choices on the part of the filmmaker. They will then attempt to explain how those choices help to deepen their understanding of the meaning within the scene.

Differentiation: Students can work in groups to decide which elements in “Paperman” they want to write about and then discuss them together before writing their responses.

Resources

- Braff, Z. (Director). (2004). *Garden state* [Film]. Camelot pictures, Double Features Films, and Jersey Films.
- Cornish, J. (Artist). (2007). *Harry potter and the order of the phoenix: Hall of prophecy storyboards* [Storyboard]. Warner bros. pictures.
- Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1963). *The birds* [Film]. Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions.
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Card sort. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/147
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Choice boards. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/926
- K20 Center. (n.d.) Cognitive comics. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/198
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Elbow partners. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/116
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Two stars and a wish. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/83
- Kahrs, J. (Director). (2012). *Paperman* [Short Film]. Walt Disney Animation Studios.
- Lowery, D. & Bell, J. (Artists). (1993) *Jurassic park storyboard* [Storyboard] in Shay, D. & Duncan, J. (1993). *The making of Jurassic Park*. Boxtree.
- Michelson, H. (Artist). (1963). *The birds* [Storyboard]. Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions.
- Russell, D. (Artist). (2001). *Moulin rouge storyboards* [Storyboard]. 20th Century Fox.
- Stanton, A. (Director). (2008). *WALL-E* [Film]. Camelot pictures, Pixar Animation Studios.
- Szhou, T. & Szhou, T. (2025, Jan. 13). *Where do you put the camera?* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wa1O3nqW5hQ
- Tavoularis, A., Johnston, J., & Beddoes, I. (Artists). (1977). *Star wars storyboards* [Storyboards]. Lucasfilm Ltd.