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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2015 Volume IV: Using Film in the Classroom/How to Read a Film

Look Behind You! Mastering the Art of Suspense with Poe and Hitchcock

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by Meg Deweese

“Look Behind You! Mastering the Art of suspense with Poe and Hitchcock” is a curriculum unit designed for teachers of students in grade eight and above who are searching for a variety of engaging instructional strategies through which their students will learn about the formal elements of literature and film. This unit will allow students to explore the works of two masters of suspense, early American author Edgar Allan Poe and twentieth century British filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, in order to identify and apply the elements of literature such as suspense, mood, tone, imagery, point of view and symbol. They will also be introduced to the formal elements of film, such as cinematography, sound, editing, and several other elements and become adept at understanding how suspense is created in literature and in film. Through the use of high interest suspense narratives, a short story and a full length film, students will have many opportunities for deep and relevant analysis, including several writing components, storyboarding, and the use of technology to create their own works of art. Ultimately, students will come away with a deeper understanding of suspense narratives, the elements and techniques used to create them, as well as enough mastery to be able to apply their learning throughout other units of study now and in the future.

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 8; recommended for English Language Arts, grade 7-12)

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