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

"There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it."

-Alfred Hitchcock

Introduction

I have taught an integrated American Studies course for eighth graders at Thoreau Demonstration Academy for sixteen years. While part of Tulsa Public Schools, we operate quite differently from the other middle schools. Opened in 1998 with the goal of building a school program around research based, best teaching practices, we were the first middle school in the district to require our students to wear uniforms, require teachers to create soothing and secure environments within their classrooms and to continuously design thematic and integrated curriculum among both vertical and horizontal teams of teachers. Each core teacher at Thoreau teaches two subjects in an integrated ninety minute block of time to rather large numbers of students, either Language Arts/Social Studies or Math/Science, and meets weekly to collaborate and plan with both same subject teachers and grade level teams. As my students' Language Arts teacher and Social Studies teacher all rolled into one, I have the unique opportunity to provide integrated, literacy- based instructional lessons for my students.

Our school serves as a "lottery" magnet for the large urban district of Tulsa Public Schools, pulling our students randomly in equal numbers from the four quadrants of the city. There are two other magnet middle schools in the district; however, they employ rigorous academic eligibility requirements that we do not, as our students are randomly drawn from the entire student pool in the district. Because of this, our school is a diverse mix of socio-economic groups, ethnic groups, and academic abilities. Functioning as an authentic reflection of our city, our school's population is made up of Caucasian white, African American, Native American and Hispanic students. Thoreau has been quite successful and remains unique in our district due to our continued efforts to offer a consistent academic program that is celebratory and inclusive of the diversity

within. My students certainly reflect the heterogeneity of our urban landscape in every area, including the learning spectrum, which includes numerous students on an IEP, English language learners, gifted and talented, and every type of student in between. As such, I work hard to design lessons that will be highly engaging, rigorous and empowering for every student. Our school classrooms have no desks, only round tables for four. I find this to be instrumental in reaching the spectrum of students I have, as collaborative learning is a major part of most activities and lessons. My students are adolescents who absolutely require physical movement and numerous social opportunities to share and talk; the collaborative grouping meets their needs as well as mine as the one responsible for providing the best learning environment for each and every student.

Rationale

Great stories with relevant themes and motifs never fail to intrigue my student population. Each school year I carefully choose numerous literary works with a firm grasp of my audience in mind. Yet I find that while they seem to enjoy the stories on the surface, they are not able to apply their knowledge and comprehension of the essential formal elements of the narrative texts during later units of study. I am concerned that the depth of analysis of a text is usually lacking. Similarly, my students seem to experience this with any type of film study. Students are overjoyed to hear that a movie is in the offering and they enthusiastically prepare for the experience. Yet despite my heretofore best efforts to help them make the deep, desired connections, there simply is not enough lasting learning taking place. I never show a film for filler or fluff and am usually disappointed in general with the outcome of my film related curriculum. Therefore, I want to connect the two distinct yet similar genres of narratives, literature and film, into a cohesive unit of study. Combining film with literature in my class is a natural fit with regards to the interest levels of my students as they, like most adolescents, are very visual. However, I want to hone my own skills in interpreting and analysis of film so that the addition of film will be more than a reward for reading the novel or short story. Instead, I want to use films as a central component of our curriculum and provide a depth of learning through thoughtful literary and film analysis while at the same time challenge them to think about literature in text format and in film in an evaluative way.

The curriculum unit will focus on the formal element of suspense, along with those elements that are found in the suspense genre such as foreshadowing, point of view, mood, tone, imagery and symbolism. These elements are found in both literary works and in film, and suspense is always a sure way to engage and excite my students. It will be necessary for my students to have a solid foundation of them both in order to ascertain the themes and universal truths that will help them internalize the learning of the elements as well as the fundamental procedures and components of the film medium. Our state standards for eighth grade language arts include that of analyzing how differences in points of view of the characters and of the audience or readers create such effects as suspense. Therefore, suspense will be our organizing concept as we work through it and all of the other literary elements that work together to create great narratives. I want to move away from teaching the literary elements as separate and individual components on a list in the notebook and instead give my students opportunities to identify the elements through analysis of rich, high interest texts and films in a more organic way. The relevance of the elements will be more profound to my students when they have had experience "playing" with them in various mediums. My students tend to connect more profoundly with a concept or topic when they have a personal connection. The universal themes running

through narratives, both in film and in written text, allow for my students to connect personally and critically to the literary elements, giving them a relevance that no list of terms could ever provide.

Objectives

- Students will be able to apply the elements of literature, primarily those that help create suspense, to written text in the format of a short story.
- Students will be able to identify the formal elements of film and the various devices and techniques employed by filmmakers in a filmed narrative.
- Students will be able to use their knowledge of filmmaking techniques to further their understanding of the essential literary elements that make up all forms of narrative.
- Students will be able to critically compare a short story with a film version, determining how they reveal the literary elements in the same ways and in different ways.

Enduring Understandings

The formal elements of literature are concepts that apply to film as well as literature.

- Authors purposely create a desired effect in a reader through their use of the literary elements.
- Filmmakers purposely create a desired effect as they use the formal elements of film (narrative, cinematography, mise-en-scene, sound and movement) are used to influence the audience's perception and understanding and to create suspense.
- Identifying the formal elements of film can help us become more critical viewers.

Essential Questions

- How does an understanding of the essential literary elements assist a reader/viewer in "reading" what the author/filmmaker is trying to get across?
- How do the elements of filmmaking, such as color, lighting, sound, use of angles, and camera shots, help tell a story?
- How do writers create suspense in a literary work?
- How do filmmakers create suspense in a film?
- How does a filmmaker use setting to shape how we understand the story action? How is this similar or different from how an author uses setting?
- How do film techniques influence our understanding of characters, mood, plot, or theme?
- How do films and literature inform me about my humanity and that of others?

Content Background

Alfred Hitchcock realized that audiences found a "joy in safe terror".[1] Edgar Allan Poe stated that "Words have no power to impress the mind without the exquisite horror of their reality." Very few would disagree with either of these great artists, most of us having had some of our most enjoyable and profound moments as an audience member riding out a text or film on the edge of our seat, delighting in the abject fear from the comfort of our favorite reading chair or theater seat. Suspense, the organizing concept of this unit, is defined as the state of uncertainty and expectation combined with anxiety or apprehension. One needs to look carefully with a critical eye at the works of the two aforementioned artists most commonly associated with the suspense genre, each of them in fact often referred to as a "master of suspense", in order to determine how suspense is created. Edgar Allan Poe is arguably the finest practitioner of the suspense and horror genre in American literature; indeed, he is considered a pioneer in the field. On the other hand, no discussion on suspense would be complete without director and filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, a giant in the genre with over 50 suspense related films to his credit. In order to analyze the chosen literature and film texts with a critical lens, my students will need to have a good grasp of the formal elements of both literature and film. Of course, this unit is designed so that successful mastery of the elements will derive organically and purposely through experiencing the texts and films themselves. However there are genre specific terms and concepts that need to be played with prior to diving into the narratives. The formal elements of text and film are very similar, as with the term narrative, which is the all important storytelling component. However, there are terms and techniques specific to only film or written texts. For instance, editing and cinematography are particular to film only.

For the purpose of this unit, we will not look at every element of literature, but narrow our focus to those that work in conjunction with the creation of suspense. Therefore, an understanding of the meaning of suspense is necessary, as well as some of the other elements that play a supporting role in the creation of suspense, such as point of view (narrator), mood, tone, imagery, and symbol. All of these elements may be found in both text and film and must be understood in order to determine how a writer or a filmmaker is able to create suspenseful stories. It is equally important for the analysis of film to have a basic foundation of the terminology germane to the genre of filmmaking in order to apply the elements to the works themselves. Exceptional vehicles for the examination of the elements of both literature and film can be accomplished through the analysis of small samplings of Poe and Hitchcock's works.

One essential element of suspense literature is that of point of view. The point of view in literature is the narrator's perspective and it is often the way in which a storyteller uses point of view that helps to create suspense in a narrative. Who is telling the story affects what we know or feel about a subject. For example, can the narrator be trusted? Do we sympathize with certain characters because of a certain type of narrator? What can we know or not know based on who is the narrator? [2] In literature the most often used narrator point of views are the first person and third person. The first person narrator is a character in the story telling the story from their point of view. A third person point of view is an omniscient narrator who reveals the story from somewhere up above, all knowing and revealing what it wants to and when it wants to the characters and the readers. Put simply, the point of view refers to the position from which something is seen and how that determines what the reader sees. Both types can be used in powerful ways to create suspense

Another important window onto how suspense is created by a writer is the way they create mood. Mood is considered as the atmosphere of the work and how that atmosphere evokes emotions and feelings in the

reader is controlled by the writer. Mood's close partner, tone, on the other hand is the attitude of the writer towards the reader or audience and is usually conveyed by word choice. A writer's thoughtful use of mood and tone are essential to the creation of a suspenseful experience for the reader. Another important component of suspense is the use of symbols. Symbols are used by a writer or filmmaker to confer significance to ideas and qualities thereby making them different from the literal sense. A helpful way to identify whether something is being used as a symbol is to notice when something or someone is "what it is and something more".[3] The use of a symbolic object or individual connotes an entirely different or more significant meaning to the item or words. Film is actually well suited to the use of symbol as a director has the use of lighting, framing, and numerous other devices and can be as obvious as he or she need to be. Imagery is also integral to the way in which a writer or filmmaker tells a great suspense story. The definition of imagery is visually descriptive or figurative language; imagery brings words or film narrative to life for the viewer or reader. A writer must use word choice masterfully to bring the words to life off of the page. The filmmaker, on the other hand, has a myriad of ways to do so with the use of cinematography, mise-en-scene, editing, and sound. After all, films are images and imagery.

When text and narrative are part of a film, there are some of the same elements at play but also elements that are unique to filmmaking. These elements can be broken down into five categories. First, there is the narrative itself. Like the narrative of a written work the narrative in a film is what the movie is about; the events of the story, the characters, and the world in which the narrative takes place. Cinematography, on the other hand, is unique to film and is dependent on photography. The cinematography adds to and enhances the narrative through how the camera is controlled. One can think of the cinematography as "writing in movement", creating that all important element of filmmaking, the movement. Mise-en-scene is a third component of the formal elements of film and includes basically everything that appears in a frame. This includes the sets, locations, actors, props, costumes, light and shadows. Also unique to the film is editing, the use of time and continuity as the tools in presenting the narrative. How long a shot lasts, fade outs and fade ins, and how the separate takes of film are cut are all critical to the creation of suspense in film. Finally, the use of sound in film is crucial to the building of suspense. Dialogue, sound effects and music are all thoughtfully woven into the great suspense films.

Poe uses the literary elements in masterful ways in his masterpiece of suspense, the short story *The Tell Tale Heart*. A discussion of any of Poe's works requires some knowledge of Poe's life story and the peculiar and often sad events of it. Poe has become a symbol himself, representing darkness, dreams and death. But the truth of Poe as a man lies somewhere in between and each of his works reveals something of the man. *The Tell Tale Heart* makes use of the first person point of view, an effective tool for creating suspense in a narrative, with a narrator who himself is insane, or "mad", a fact that he tries to convince his audience of in vain. He doesn't describe himself as mad but "very, very dreadfully nervous", hinting at his own instability making him and the entire atmosphere, or mood, of the story dangerous and suspenseful. The reader is unsure of what he might do next as the rules of logic do not apply here. The reader or audience cannot be sure of what is real and what is not; a suspense inducing quality of the story. Poe paces his story with a specific timing of events that also help to build suspense. For instance, the narrator goes into the old man's room each night to shine a lantern light in on him as he sleeps, ultimately killing the innocent old man in a violent manner because of his cataract riddled eye, or as he calls it the "vulture eye", thus creating tension and suspense in the reader. When the police arrive prior to the climactic final scene, the tension is momentarily lessened as we feel that the narrator might get away. However, ultimately, tension builds again when the narrator invites the police to stay for tea, asking them to sit directly above the floorboards where the old man's mutilated body parts lie, a gesture reminiscent of the ultimately arrogant psychopath. The way in which Poe sets the scene is also a major factor in the build-up of suspense and tension for the reader. The

story takes place at night, thereby emphasizing the narrator's dark nature and the entire tense, unstable mood of the story. Finally, Poe's use of descriptive vernacular helps drive the suspense in the story. "All in vain; because Death, in approaching him, had stalked with his black shadow before him, and enveloped the victim." states our narrator, as he himself envelopes us in his own menacing mood and tone. We the reader have been lead down an unknown path by an insane psychotic but have learned a little something about the tricks that our minds, whether sane or insane, can play on us when we are guilty of something. Poe's use of mood, tone, imagery, and point of view especially have created an enjoyable anxiety within us and created a suspenseful story that we will never forget.

A writer creates suspense through the use of their word choice and imagery, the narrator's point of view, settings and time sequences, as well as the pacing of the story. The filmmaker uses all of these along with cinematography, sound, and movement to help bring a story or narrative to life. In a film, suspense is when a spectator's tension reaches its highest level. Altan Loker eloquently describes film suspense as "bipolar tension-the state of holding energy in a form ready to execute two opposite actions, each of which is blocking the other's way and involving guilt, free-floating anxiety and also specific fears caused by attachment of anxiety to particular objects and events on screen."[4] Hitchcock himself has pointed out that manipulating the range of narration in film helps to build suspense. In an interview with Francois Truffaut he stated: "We are now having a very innocent little chat. Let us suppose that there is a bomb underneath this table between us. Nothing happens, and then all of a sudden, "Boom!" There is an explosion. The public is surprised, but prior to this surprise, it has seen an absolutely ordinary scene, of no special consequence. Now let us take a suspense situation. The bomb is underneath the table and the public knows it, probably because they have seen the anarchist place it there. The public is aware that the bomb is going to explode at one o'clock and there is a clock in the decor. The public can see that it is a quarter to one. In these conditions this innocuous conversation becomes fascinating because the public is participating in the scene. The audience is longing to warn the characters on the screen: 'You shouldn't be talking about such trivial matters. there's a bomb beneath you and it's about to explode!'"[5] This somewhat wordy quote gives us a more clear idea of Hitchcock's genius with suspense.

The building of suspense in film is similar to literary works in that the creator can allow the reader or viewer in on what is going on to create the suspense, causing anticipation from the superior range of knowledge given to the audience. Conversely, Hitchcock as a filmmaker is also able to manipulate the narration through the depth of the spectator's knowledge. Here is where the narration may go deeply into the character's psychological states, as Hitchcock does so often in his films. The plot may only show us what the characters themselves actually say and do. Or it may be that the filmmaker takes a more subjective approach and allows us in on what the characters' see and hear. This second choice is more apt to build suspense as we are drawn into the story as participants as well as spectators, especially with the use of specific film techniques like the tweaking of sound, motion, and point of view shots.[6] By controlling the way in which information is released to the audience, the actual suppression of the narrative can disrupt the narrative causing a manipulation and distortion, or suspense. Hitchcock is a master at this as he builds up suspense in sections which are dependent on a variety of different complications.[7]

All of this can be seen or "read" in Hitchcock's masterpiece of suspense, *Strangers on a Train*, through looking at the five formal elements of film above. Not only are we in on what the characters are seeing and feeling, but Hitchcock's artful use of cinematography controls and manipulates the viewer. It is also a perfect example of Hitchcock's extreme formalism as he has controlled each and every frame; his penchant for completely designing all of his own story boards is quite evident here. This is apparent right away in the opening segment

as the spectator sees a train station and two very different pairs of feet walking opposite directions.. We see immediately from the style of shoes that these men are very different, almost opposites, with the feet belonging to Bruno Anthony encased in two toned stylish shoes and the other more rugged shoes belonging to the athlete Guy Haines. When their feet accidentally bump on the train, actually crisscrossing, we are well into the primary theme of the film, that of doubles and crossing, and are finally given privy to seeing the full characters of Bruno and Guy. It continues as the scene cuts to a view of the railroad tracks ahead, crisscrossing and going in opposite directions. We also witness Bruno order drinks for the two, doubles of course. There are certainly plenty of reasons for us, the audience, to suspect some sort of duplicity and double cross in the future. After Bruno has suggested the perfect murder plan to Guy in which they will each kill the other one's burdensome relation, Guy rebuffs Bruno's plan and leaves the train, inadvertently leaving behind his lighter that is decorated with a pair of tennis rackets that are crossed. This clearly foreshadows events to come of which we are uncertain. And as the narrative unfolds we will view the events through both Bruno and Guy as different focalized points of view will switch between them. These different perceptions of point of view seem to create interest and even sympathy with the two characters, one a murderer, one possibly complicit in some way.

The camera is instrumental in so much of a film's narrative, and no less so than in *Strangers on a Train*. We are introduced to Guy's estranged wife, Miriam, who wears thick lensed glasses, glasses that will be a prominent part of the suspense of the story. Miriam is ultimately followed to an amusement park at night by Bruno and stalked through a tunnel of love, replete with darkly ominous shadows on the wall and the sound of Miriam's screams right before she emerges healthy and fine from the tunnel. This scene takes the reader on a bit of a roller coaster ride, appropriate for an amusement park setting, as we are tricked into thinking Miriam is killed in the tunnel. The dark shadows, the ever present cacophony of carnival music and sounds, and Miriam's screaming have intensified our anxiety for her and Bruno. Soon after she emerges, Bruno is upon her. With the use of the camera lens, we are allowed to view Miriam's own murder in a stunning point of view shot. We are privy to Bruno strangling Miriam, through at first a close up of Miriam looking at us as Bruno. We then find ourselves looking through her very own glasses, which have been knocked to the ground and turned up towards the murderer as Bruno strangles her closer to us through the lens. Not only is this chilling, but Hitchcock has used purely visuals and sound to convey the horror of this scene. Similar glasses will reappear later on Guy's future sister in law, causing Bruno to fixate on the glasses, becoming drawn in closer to the lenses through some camera close ups, and ultimately going into a trance, strangling a party guest almost to death.

One of the scenes that exemplifies the creation of mood in a suspense film is when Bruno waits across the street for Guy to return home. He is standing in the darkness, half hidden by shadows and behind the iron grill fence, the shadows creating bars across his face. Guy goes over to him and his face is also covered by the bars. The dark and sinister atmosphere increases the anxiety for the viewer and makes clear that the men are complicit-the bars, or prison bars, symbolize the idea that these men are linked by the one perpetrating a murder and the other reaping the benefits from it.

We see the theme of the crisscross again during the first tennis match scene. We, the viewers, witness an audience at a tennis match in which every person is turning their heads back and forth along with the tennis ball-except for Bruno, who sits in the center of the crowd and is staring deadpan only at Guy. It is a very unnerving scene with only the sound of the ball hitting the ground with each play and the motion of the heads going back and forth with the sound. This is another great example of the power of movement and sound in film, elements not possible in written text. Another type of movement is used in the scene in which Bruno is the sole person standing off in the distance, completely alone on the steps of the Jefferson Memorial, again

staring straight at guy. The movement this time comes from Guy's car as it is driving past the monument while Bruno stands still, his gaze directly following Guy's car. Much like at the tennis match, the movement is around Bruno, making him that much more threatening. He is an ominous dark spec against the massive white memorial structure and the juxtaposition here enhances the fear and tension of the viewer.

The use of editing, in this case parallel editing, and how it creates suspense, are on full display in the scene of the second tennis match, one in which Guy has his mind on retrieving his lighter, recognizing that Bruno intends to bring it back to the place where he murdered Miriam in order to frame Guy for her murder. Guy is clearly agitated during this match as the camera begins to film him using long shots to capture the pounding of the rackets and balls. The scene then switches to a taut scene in which Bruno accidentally drops the lighter into a sewer grate on his way from the arena to leave the lighter at the site of the crime. Guy has seen Bruno leave and is tense and panicked, anxious to finish the match. Meanwhile Bruno makes numerous attempts to retrieve the lighter by sticking his hand and arm down into the grate. We see the lighter fall even deeper and are vicariously drawn into Bruno's dilemma as he must stretch further and further as it looks more and more like an impossible task. At last he retrieves it and makes off at the same time as Guy finally finishes the match, the entire time with the two types of editing switching back and forth, or crisscrossing. The tennis match has gone from long shots that were shorter each time, switching back and forth to the scene in which Bruno is determinedly trying to retrieve the lighter, where the camera is getting closer and closer to the hand in the grate. The audience is holding their collective breath as Bruno attempts over and over again to retrieve it. This incredible example of parallel editing creates the tension that is so necessary for suspense to occur. The pace is ever increasing in this scene, a narrative sequence ripe for suspense.

The final scene returns us back to the same amusement park setting as the murder of Miriam, this time with Bruno racing to get the lighter onto the Tunnel of Love island for the police to find and with Guy in hot pursuit. The music is loud and carnival like, there are brightly lit rides and throngs of people as they race through the scene, ending up on a merry go round full of adults and children. They fight violently among the riders, causing a policeman to shoot at them, accidentally killing the man running the ride, causing his dead weight to lean onto the handle that controls the speed of the ride, increasing the speed to its maximum, most dangerous speed. Amid the screams of people on the ride, as well as onlookers, Bruno and Guy continue fighting, with the camera shots going in closer and closer mixed with far away shots of the wildly careening merry go round, until the ride destroys itself and Bruno dies with the lighter clutched in his hand. The lighter with the crisscrossed tennis racquets, a symbol for Bruno and Guy's crossed paths and their double nature, has also been at the core of the building of suspense. A simple object that when used in the capable hands of Hitchcock is critical to our suspense filled ride.

Hitchcock admitted that Poe was indeed a factor in his love of and interest in the suspense genre. He maintained that the origins of his desire to make suspense films was directly linked to his experiences with reading Poe's works and reading about Poe himself. With Poe he discovered lessons about how an audience responds to terror and the fact that there was a joy in experiencing fear and anxiety while safe and sound. While learning how to create and sustain narrative suspense, he learned from Poe to focus an audience's attention on a certain object, such as the vulture eye in *Tell Tale Heart* and the lighter in *Strangers on a Train.* Poe and Hitchcock's mutual interest in all things irrational provided subject matter that further created audience unease and provided infinite possibilities for the creation of suspense in their narratives. It is clear after reading Poe's works and viewing Hitchcock's films that both men understood that people were in general motivated by irrational obsessions and guilt. Poe called these impulses "imps of the perverse". The fact that both led lives that were full of self-demons and were tormented in some way is one reason why Hitchcock looked so closely at Poe's works. He maintained that the sadness of Poe's life made a tremendous impression

on him and he felt that both were prisoners of suspense in a way.

There are differences of course between the two. Poe used logic and the intelligence of often mad narrators to unsettle our serenity. Hitchcock took this a step further into even more dangerous territory by tricking us into actually rooting for the criminally insane. In effect, Hitchcock forces us to actually question our own character and sanity. In a perfect world, these two would meet and thrill each other with their creativity and ideas. Alas, it is probably for the best. The whole idea is just too terrifying...literally!

Strategies

The Organizer: A Foldable

I want my students to be able to identify and evaluate the use of the elements of literature and of film through the literary works and films that they encounter. I never want my students to miss out on the joys and enrichment of the human condition that only literature and film can provide because of district time and pacing constraints. Although it is very important to know and understand how the literary elements drive a work of literature or film, it is even more important that they be able to delve deeper and take away more from the artistry because of them. They have had experience with elements in the past, however, I want to make sure that they have a solid foundation with which to analyze the upcoming story and films. Some of the elements will be mentioned as we go along but not focused on. For this unit, I want my students to be able to focus in on and understand the elements of imagery, mood, tone, point of view, symbol, and most importantly suspense. I will show them a power point and have them create a foldable organizer on which to write the terms and definitions from the slideshow. A foldable is a very effective and student friendly tool for students to create an interactive notes organizer that they fold, cut and glue using paper. They can easily be attached to a pocket in a notebook and are a much more useful tool for studying terms and concepts than the traditional note taking strategies. The foldable we design will have space available later for the formal elements of film to be added. This structure of ours will have six tabs for the literary elements and six for the formal elements. I always want my students to be actively engaged, even in this preparatory stage, in order to build enthusiasm for the unit early on.

Elegy for Poe

I will show my students an older but effective biography of Edgar Allan Poe by A and E in order for my students to truly capture the essence of Poe as a man; his life is inextricably connected to his works and knowledge of the events that shaped him as a person enhances the analysis of any of his works, especially in relation to his use of the suspense genre. Unfortunately, much of Poe's life is mired in myth, making him out to be little more than a caricature one might find in a haunted house. After viewing the film, I want my students to synthesize the information from the biographical film into a portrait of Poe through an elegy. An elegy is a reflective poetic form of remembrance and remorse for someone or something that has been used for centuries. Elegies have a distinct tone of remorse and praise highly or simply lament the passing of someone or something. I want my students to capture the important life moments of Poe using a more concise way than with an essay type of writing. I want them to not only synthesize the information from the film but also to have more practice with the writing of poetry. After this unit of study, we will tackle several of Poe's poems and this will connect nicely.

Analysis of *The Tell Tale Heart*: Storyboard

Our first analysis will be of Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart*. In my classroom we read literary works with dual purposes in mind. First, literature is to be enjoyed and experienced, a positive adventure into the unknown. Our first reading we will read along with the Poe's narrator, jumping with fright and finding the joy in the tenseness and suspense, the words and imagery. It is during this reading that I can playfully roll my eyeball marble onto their desk or tap them on the back with a gelatinous human heart, both easy to find at the post-Halloween clearance sale. After we have read it for the first time together, we will discuss the literary elements that were added to our foldables. I will then give them a "Poe-ganizer" on which they can track the narrative and jot down notes on each of the six elements as they reread the story with their collaborative group. Together, my students are liable to come up with many more examples of suspense, mood, etc. than they would on their own.

Hitchcock, the director and creative genius behind the film we will soon enjoy and analyze, is well known for drawing his own very detailed storyboards prior to each movie that he made. Storyboards for films are a series of comic strip-like sketches of the shots in each scene. They will often include notation about costume, lighting, camera work, sound and motion. A storyboard helps give the cinematographers and special effects people a preliminary idea of what the finished film will look like, but as with Hitchcock, can be used by a director to control every detail. There are some great websites where students can create a storyboards using technology in the classroom. In my case, our technology is limited and often requires a much longer time to complete due to the constraints and limitations placed upon teachers. Therefore, I will have my students create their own with colored pencils, markers and paper and have them add it to their interactive notebook. Before they begin their storyboard, I want them to go back to the story and think about each of the elements of film we have just gone over. They will now act as a film director and create a storyboard for a film version of *The Tell Tale Heart*, one that includes at least six comic frames, each with visual and caption. They must include how their filmed version of the story would build suspense with cinematography, sound, editing, mise-en-scene, and pacing. After we have shared our storyboards, I will show them Scott Mansfield's twenty-five minute long film adaptation of *The Tell Tale Heart.* We will discuss how this adaptation used those formal elements and how their version held up against it.

Analysis of Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train:* Movie Review

I will then have my students take out their foldables and add the formal elements of film from the power point to their organizer. I want them to be able to not only define the terms, but to play with them a while as these are brand new terms and concepts for them. How well did they use the formal elements in their storyboard? As a class we will play a game of Fact or Fiction in which collaborative teams play against each other for points, trying to decide if the statements I throw out at them about the literary elements and the formal elements of film are true or not true, based on the information they have on their foldables. This fun and energizing competition ensures that every student has heard and seen all of the elements and are ready to identify them in a film. It also serves as a team building exercise for my collaborative classroom.

Now that my students have experience using the elements of literature and have played filmmaker with a storyboard adaptation, it is time to meet Mr. Alfred Hitchcock. I will show the students a brief televised interview with Hitchcock in order for them to get a sense of the man and his creative, genius and intriguing eccentricities. We will then turn our attention to Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train.* We will watch the film in its entirety, only stopping at pivotal scenes and making sure that everyone is jotting down briefs notes for each column of their "Terror-izer" graphic organizer. This graphic organizer will have a column for each of the

formal elements of film and allow them to quickly jot their ideas in the columns, hopefully not taking them away from the movie itself. They will then be able to use this during our discussions.

After we have discussed and analyzed the movie for its unique film qualities, I want the students to now be able to write about the film, putting onto paper their thoughts and analysis will help them to synthesize the elements and creation of suspense in film. The students will write a Movie Review for the other students. Their review will be five well-crafted paragraphs that analyze the film using a sampling of the elements, (editing, sound, motion, etc.) as well as their opinion on whether it was a good example of suspense or not.

Filmmaking

A final activity to further help my students synthesize the barrage of information and experiences they have had thus far will be a culminating activity that will allow my students to explore the art of filmmaking. It is important that my students be able to apply what they have learned in a personal way. I want them to collaborate with their group to make an original suspense movie short that showcases what they have gleaned from the previous activities. I will have them use the Imovie format and create an original storyboard with their group. My students will no doubt enjoy creating their own version of a Hitchcock movie, replete with props, costuming, and cinematography. I want to keep the student made films relatively brief so that we may view and evaluate everyone's films. I want my students to be able to track the formal elements used in each of the film shorts, as well as review the short for enjoyment and the qualities of suspense.

Activities

Activity One: Preparing for Analysis: the Poe-ganizer

Materials:

- Power point with information about the elements of suspense
- enough 8 ½ by 11 paper (preferably colored paper) for each student to have two sheets
- scissors
- rulers

Process:

I will first show my students a power point that will help us discuss the essential elements of literature that we will focus on in this unit. I will have my students make two foldables at this time although one we will not use one of them until another activity. They will take each sheet of paper and fold in half like a hotdog, leaving a ½ inch difference. They will then measure out six equal parts on one side of the hotdog, cutting with scissors only to the top of the paper, thereby making six tabs. They will write the terms on the tabs and their notes about the terms under the tabs, using the ½ inch remainder to write the title of the notes, in this case: Essential Literary Elements of Suspense. I will have them make the other one while we have our supplies out but we will not write anything on it yet.

Activity Two: Remembering Poe, the Man

Materials:

- A&E Film *Edgar Allan Poe*
- Power point with brief information on elegies

Process:

I will show my students the film *The Mystery of Edgar Allan Poe* by A&E Biography. The film is only forty five minutes long but is full of great information about Poe's life and important contributions to American literature. I will let them know that they will process this information after the film so they may want to jot down some notes here and there, as long as it doesn't prevent them from viewing the film. When we have completed the film, I will allow my students the time to discuss the film with their groups, focusing on what they found most interesting or important. This should take about ten minutes. I will then ask them to produce an elegy for Mr. Poe. On the power point I will have some background information on what an elegy is and an example of one from part of the song *American Pie* by Don McLean, an elegy to the death of rock and roll and those that die in a plane crash. An elegy is a poem that remembers someone who has died. Their elegy poem, will need to have eight to ten lines and include the reasons why they mourn Poe, including at least five specific references from something they saw in the film. Their elegy poem may rhyme or not. Later in the year we will make reference to the elegy poem when we analyze Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!".

Activity Three: Poe's *Tell Tale Heart*

Materials:

- Copies of *The Tell Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe
- Storyboard Template
- Copy of Scott Mansfield's film *The Tell Tale Heart*

Process:

It is now time for us to delve into Poe's short story, *The Tell Tale Heart.* We will read this short story together for the first time so that no one is left behind. We often do close readings of texts in order to become better readers, but this quite frankly is not one of those occasions. Instead, I want them to be completely free and at ease so that they may enjoy our story. I only stop reading to them a couple of times so as not to disrupt Poe's pacing. However, I will need to check for understanding somewhat as we go along. After we have read the story, we will discuss the story briefly as a class, allowing my students to grapple with whatever they need.

Once we have discussed the story a little, my students will then create a graphic representation of how a film adaptation of *The Tell Tale Heart* would look like; what would appear in each shot in the film adaptation. This is called a storyboard. Their storyboard should look exactly like the finished film image on a movie screen would look. They will draw three cartoon frames, or shots, down the left side of a piece of paper. They will then have two column headings on the right side of the paper with the following headings: "*What did you want todemonstrate?*" and "*What lines from the story helped you see this?*" They will repeat this on a second piece of paper so that their completed storyboard will have six shots.[8]

I won't go into all of the formal elements yet, however, I will remind them of how movies make use of specific techniques that a writer cannot, such as lighting, sound, and camera work. They may also come up with some ideas and techniques from their prior experience with films. Artistry and skill is not what is important here but

instead it is the demonstration of their comprehension of the story as well as how they will interpret it as a film that are the important points.

After we have some time to share our storyboards in our groups, I will show them an actual film adaptation of *The Tell Tale Heart.* We will discuss how this adaptation compares with their storyboard.

Activity Four: Hitchcock and *Strangers on a Train*

Materials:

- Copy of Alfred Hitchcock's *Strangers on a Train*
- Pre-made second foldable
- Power point of the Formal Elements of Film

Process:

Like with Poe, I want my students to have a sense of Alfred Hitchcock as a man and as an artist. I will show them the fifty-five minute documentary of Alfred Hitchcock on Youtube from "Living Famously". I will have my students take out their second blank foldable so that they may now record the formal elements of film from the power point.

We will then watch the film *Strangers on a Train.* I will stop the film at pivotal places in order to point out different elements or to get comments. Again, this will be only a few times so that I don't interrupt the pace and suspenseful ride of the movie.

When we have finished the film, I will have my students write a Movie Review consisting of a well composed five paragraph essay that describes how the film is suspenseful and also encourage or discourage others to see it, depending on their opinion.[9]

Activity Five: That's a Wrap!

Materials:

- Access to the IMovie app via Ipads or computers for student groups
- Access to costumes, props etc. for filmmaking

Process:

We have now experienced the elements of literature and film through two masters of suspense. It is now time for my students to demonstrate what they have learned by making an original short suspense film with their group. I will allow them time to create, write and gather any supplies prior to a day set aside for filming. I will instruct them to build suspense in Poe and Hitchcock-like ways, using any and all of what they have learned in this unit.

When my students have completed their films we will have a viewing day and watch and enjoy all of the films as a class. We will evaluate the films and vote on our favorites.

Content Standards

This curriculum unit addresses numerous state and district content standards for my English Language Arts and Social Studies classroom. Our state department of education and the state legislature recently and quite suddenly dropped out of the Common Core national collective after a mere three years of involvement. However, we are currently still working under the standards written during that time and that were put into place under the Common Core. In fact they are almost exactly the same, except they are now called Oklahoma PASS standards.

This unit of study will enable students to achieve the standard that asks students to analyze how the differences in the points of view of characters, as well as those of the audience or reader, can create effects such as humor or suspense. This unit allows for a variety of analysis opportunities for students along with the scaffolding required for effective analysis, such as with the mastery of the formal elements of literature and film. The in depth and close look at suspense as an element in literature and film, the organizing thread throughout this unit, is essential to the mastery of this standard. (RL 8.6)

Another integral reading standard for the eighth grade is that the students should be able to analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story departs from or stays faithful to the text or script, as well as are able to evaluate the choices made by the director of a film or live event. Our comparison of Poe's written text with that of the filmed and live versions the students will view will ensure mastery of this standard. The analysis of Hitchcock's film and his directorial nuances will certainly further support the students' depth of knowledge with respect to this standard. (RL. 8.7)

Determining an author's point of view and purpose in a text as well as the analysis of how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence in the text will naturally flow from our study of Poe's *The Tell Tale Heart*, a story told from the perspective of a "madman", increasing the suspenseful edge ten-fold. (RL 8.6)

Upon completion of their Movie Review assignment, students will have worked through their film and text analysis in a solid piece of writing. Writing arguments that support claims with clear and relevant evidence is another of our state and district standards for English Language Arts that is ably supported by this unit. (W 8.1)

Ultimately, students are required by the standards to spend extended blocks of time on reading and writing at the high end of text complexity for their grade levels. This curriculum unit does this and much more using a variety of strategies and activities. (RL 8.10 and W8.10)

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Notes

1. Perry, Dennis R, "Imps of the Perverse," 12.
2. John Golden, *Reading in the Dark: Using film as a Tool in the English Classroom.* (NCTE: Illinois, 2001), 82.
3. Golden, *Reading,*82
4. Altan Loker, *Film and Suspense*. (Trafford: Canada, 2005), 28.
5. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*. (McGraw Hill, 2010), 94.
6. Bordwell and Thompson, 95.
7. Smith, Susan. *Hitchcock: Suspense, Humour and Tone*. (British Film Institute: London, 2000), 41.
8. Golden, *Reading,*
9. Corrigan, Timothy. *A Short Guide to Writing About Film.* (Pearson, 2012), 9.