



## **Film and Art: Setting the Stage with Framing**

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Without the thought process, it is just “photographs of people talking”.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

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Before a performance, live or recorded, many things have to be taken into account. Location, setting, props, and costumes are vital in most cases, as well as where the camera will be and plans for zooming and angling and such. Questions need to be answered and scenes need to be planned! Will the camera stay still or be moved from place to place? Are there things in the scene that will need to be moved or changed? How much space is needed for movement of the camera and the people involved-actors, reporters, speakers? There are a great number of questions involved and that is why planning is essential.

Mise en scene (pronounced mee-z on sen) translates from a French theatrical term that means “placing on stage”. Anyone who creates, whether it be through writing, painting, sculpting, theater, or film, knows how important “setting the stage” is. Mise en scene covers the basics of who, what, when, and where while the storyline fills in the blanks and also covers the why and how. Whereas in theatrical performances a stage designer works in a 3-dimensional space, in a film it gets “more complicated, a blend of the visual conventions of the live theater with those of painting.”<sup>2</sup> The filmmaker must think about and deal with the “fluid choreographing of visual elements that are constantly in flux.”<sup>3</sup>

The frame is the visual box of what is seen and the director must consider not only what is physically set in the frame but also distance, angle, and focus. Changing camera angles and changing focus, panning in and out or even using special effects are things that make film significantly different than its counterpart, theater. Once the stage is set with background, foreground, props, lighting, costumes, and actors, (the visual elements that make up the who, what, when, where part) framing comes into play to build a relationship between the viewer and who or what is in the scene before filming or photography can begin. Mise en scene is largely about the thought process in film making of what will be in each individual frame, each scene, and each sequence. Then, after the filming is done comes splicing, editing, and cutting film to create a final, completed, piece.

Alain Bergala wrote, in *The Cinema Hypothesis*, that it is essential to provide students with “an alternative to purely consumerist cinema” and that having select films available for students can shed light on teaching “based on setting up connections between films, sequences, shots, and images drawn from other art forms”.<sup>4</sup> In this unit I will present full movies, scenes from movies, clips, and stills, as well as non-film photographs and paintings to help students understand and practice “mise en scene” framing. The realistic narrative is the focus of the films used in this unit, but other genres do follow the same basic guidelines. This unit is meant for my high school Art and Filmography class but could easily be used to teach film, photography, or 2-dimensional art; it could also be used in other classroom settings, in particular in Drama and English.

## **Classroom Environment**

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I teach Art 1 at Will Rogers College High School and Middle School in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Student demographics in our district show 38% are multilingual learners, 14% are students with disabilities, and 11% gifted and talented, with race/ethnicity at 37% Hispanic/Latinx, 23% Black, 22% white, 11% multiracial, 5% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander.<sup>5</sup> Our own school has a much larger multilingual and Hispanic population and a smaller white population. While the district shows 79% being economically disadvantaged, our student population is slightly higher. Out of approximately 1700 students in our school, I am privileged to teach roughly 10% of them. I teach 6th-12th graders, 6th and 7th having separate classes and 8th through 12th in combined classes. This unit will be focused on the upper level students, in particular as a building block in an Art in Filmmaking class, though it can be used in all of my art classes as an individual Elements of Art unit for framing and composition.

## **Pedagogical Philosophy**

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My teaching philosophy revolves around integration and transference of skills and knowledge. When we teach students, it should seldom be rote memorization or single-minded; rather every subject should be taught to carry over into other areas of school and life. Because of this, I teach a lot of arts integration lessons (much to the chagrin of some students who sometimes ask, “Why are you teaching us math/science/history” and end up loving the lessons). I desire that students have learned things in my classroom that they can utilize at home, in other classes, and even in future careers. They need to learn to think within and outside of given parameters. In the end I want students to feel worthy and confident enough with what they have experienced and learned to create original thoughts and ideas to solve everyday problems. If I see a student in 10 years out in the wild, I hope they remember me and, more importantly, remember that our experiences together had a positive impact on them that still matters.

## Previous Units Using Film

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Scaffolding is when you use things to support what will come. Sometimes students need extra instruction, some bits and chunks of knowledge, to help build up to what is next. In the past I have done units using movies in different ways for my Art 1 classes. Students have always shown a strong interest in projects where movies are included. I have enjoyed using film in different ways to push students to see things a bit differently in art. “World Building” and “Movie Color Palettes” have been two of my most successful art units. My use of film for this current unit is more intentionally cinema-driven, but my prior units are helpful building blocks to this larger understanding of film, and I will draw on them as needed.

### World Building

For this unit students were shown and had discussions about multiple Science Fiction films with different styles of worlds such as *Blade Runner*, *Metropolis*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Children of Men*. Students read *Mortal Engines* by Philip Reeve, dividing chapters between groups, after which each group stood up in order by chapters of the book and explained what they read in their chapters so that all students would better understand the book as a whole in a short time period. We then had class discussions about the world building in the book, i.e., what this world looked like in our imaginations, how mankind adjusted to live in a world of scavengers, and drew images of what this world might look like. Then, we watched the 2018 movie adaptation of the novel and compared what we thought about the book’s world building versus the movie’s world building and how the director went about interpreting the book. Finally, students wrote a short story/description for their world building project and created their own 2D or 3D visual representation of the world of their own imagination and creation.

### Movie Color Palettes

For this unit we started as a class looking at how movies use color to reflect emotion, temperament, feelings, etc. I introduced clips, from various movies, such as *Spirited Away* (animation), *Edward Scissorhands*, and *The Revenant*, to discuss the “movie still-frame as art piece”, focusing on their color palettes. Students then chose their own still-frame image and color palette from a movie of their choice and these were printed for each student to work with. Students then created a self-portrait by free hand drawing or tracing a photo of themselves (depending on skill level). They used the colors from the movie color palette for their self-portrait. The major artistic challenge was that they actually had to match the movie color palette by mixing paint in black, white, and three primary colors. This activity teaches students a tremendous amount about color and mixing paints.

My new unit is definitely distinctive and different from these preceding units. For framing is completed after the world building is set and color palettes have been chosen for a scene. Therefore, lessons learned from these past units will be helpful for setting up and understanding this new unit but are not essential. The staging in films is similar to that of the stage in a theatre and it would be helpful for students to understand the inherent differences between the two in any art or drama class. In an English class students could write about these scenes after discussing them or write about an original scene they create themselves.

# Content

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## Mise en Scene

Mise en scene is a complex term compromised of four distinct formal elements.<sup>6</sup>

1. Staging the action
2. Physical setting and décor
3. Manner in which these materials are all framed
4. The manner in which they are photographed

As mentioned above, mise en scene is about setting the scene. The basic elements of mise en scene are composition, sets, props, actors, costumes, makeup, and lighting. Different sources show different specifics in terms of what is included, but it all comes down to what is seen and how it is seen by the viewer. All of these things are interrelated and equally important in the end, but for this unit, we will focus more on the aspects of framing the mise en scene, contextual framing, and territorial space. These connect to numbers 3 and 4 above.

The composition from frame to frame may change within a single scene as the camera pans in or out or from place to place focusing on different elements. Each scene may have its own feel or expression from the props and costuming employed. Diverse locations will give unique atmospheres and backdrops. Lighting can act to direct your attention or to change the time of day. How and when the elements of mise en scene are used changes everything about a film (or play, documentary, commercial, photograph, or painting).

## Framing

In theatre there is a frame that goes over and around the stage, the frame is called the “proscenium arch”. It contains the action and set design on the stage, but includes all of the acting space used, even if it reaches out into the audience and beyond. In film that arch is the frame, both figurative and literal. The frame is a “masking device that isolates objects and people only temporarily.”<sup>7</sup> The frame not only focuses on what the artist wants you to see, but how they want you to see it. We see framing in art all the time. It is important to pay attention to what is framed and how to gain an understanding of what the artist intended for us as a viewer to take in, understand, and relate to. It is no less important if it is a painting, a photograph, or a still from a movie. Alfred Hitchcock believed that in film an un-manipulated reality is filled with irrelevancies.<sup>8</sup> He used the frame of the screen like a picture frame into which the audience is peering at what is going on and he was very intentional with every shot being an individual picture, like a painting. Despite its title, his 1954 film *Rear Window* is a master class illustrating this method and his skill in using the enclosing or centripetal frame. Comparatively, Francois Truffaut, a renowned French film critic, director, and producer, offers a window in which the eyes are often intentionally led off the screen. Centrifugally. His use of framing is quite different from Hitchcock’s, but both make exceptional use of the framing process. Regardless of which method is used, it should be intentional and well planned.

The use of the frame shows us what we should be looking at and where the action is, whereas on the theatre stage the spotlight does the better job of honing in on an actor to show you where to look within the proscenium arch. In photography you are generally shown one shot out of the many taken. The chosen photo will focus intentionally on certain things, people, or a scene, but that one moment in time is all you get in each

photo. In film the camera will zoom in to where it wants you to focus from one scene to the next, there will be lighting or color that directs your attention, or there may be movement meant to catch the eye and direct you where to look. The director may be slow and intentional in a scene to get to the point of focus or they may be quick, perhaps with a blare of music or noise to direct your attention. Regardless of what is going on in the scene, setting, props, costumes, etc. the framing is going to dictate what the viewer sees and how they see it.

### Contextual Framing

Cinematographer Robert Bresson said that, “Cinematographers film where the images, like words in a dictionary, have no power and value except through their position and relation”.<sup>9</sup> Frame by frame, the movie comes together to form a sentence, a paragraph, and a story. It is important how the director frames each shot, like an author choosing the right words, in some cases more than others. Without the right framing the piece may get scrambled or misconstrued or completely lose the power it may have otherwise had. Private conversations held in a park at night give an entirely different viewpoint than a hushed conversation on the edges of a crowded party or shared during a slow dance on ballroom dancefloor. A shot may show the familiarity or foreignness of a situation or give hints to other things the viewer needs to know for a future part of the film. A director isn't likely to zoom in on a handheld mirror at the end of a scene if that mirror holds no consequence whatsoever. The framing of the item would be out of context unless, of course, the director is trying to purposefully confuse, mislead, or vex the viewer.

Framing is the determination of what is actually in the single frame or shot and the angle from which it is shot. The director of a film has the important job of determining where the camera is, how much it is zoomed in or out, the angle of the shot, how focused items in the shot are, and so much more. One way to understand that is by looking at a single image with different framing that changes the context.

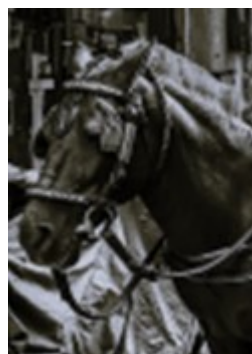


Image 1. Horse and cart in the street.<sup>10</sup> Image 2. Horse in bridle.

The importance of items in a scene can change greatly based on the framing of the image. In Image 1 we can understand the importance of the horse as it is pulling a cart in a market. It can be assumed that the driver

has stepped into a store to buy or sell something. Compared to the cart, the horse looks a little feeble, perhaps, but capable. Image 2 focuses on only the horse. We may notice the harness or haircut of the horse, but where it is or what it is doing there is much less important than in Image 1. The horse in image 2 may seem a bit more sturdy and stout since we aren't aware of what his body actually looks like. The framing changes the context. If the story is about a farmer taking his wares into the market, a close-up of the horse may be pointless, but if the story is about the horse, the close-up is evocative.

### **Territorial Space**

The context of any shot is affected by the proxemics or range chosen by the filmmaker; this is the territorial space or the space between the viewer/camera and what is in focus on the screen. Territorial space is considered a comfort zone, or alternately, a un-comfort zone when needed for the film. Zooming in and zooming out can not only tell us what the main focus is but it can also be used to show the relationship between characters and things. Zooming in, or giving a close-up, can show the intimacy between two or more characters or the isolation of a single character. Zooming in can focus on a face, or faces, to note emotional states, intimidation, and confinement. Zooming out, or going for the long shot, can show the importance of the scene's setting or what is going on in the scene, giving the viewer of bigger picture of the setting. Zooming out can also declare separation, alienation, or even freedom of the actors. There can also be extreme long shots and extreme close shots, full shots, and medium shots. The important thing is to relate the distance of the camera from the subject to what the director wants the viewer to feel or experience. Is it more important to show the horror on someone's face or the horrible thing that is giving them such a reaction, or perhaps both at the same time?

### **Aspect Ratio**

There are several characteristics to framing in film. One of these is the aspect ratio; that is the ratio of the frame's horizontal and vertical dimensions. Some students may know about this from being able to use the TV remote control to change from standard to wide screen viewing. Sometimes a film may not fit the screen properly and we change the aspect ratio to fit our own screen. Interestingly enough, today's regular (not widescreen) televisions use the same 1.33:1 screen ratio that movie screens in the 1930's to 1950's used. A widescreen TV typically has a 16:9 ratio. Today's theater movies come in a standard ratio of 1.85:1 and a widescreen ratio of 2.35:1.<sup>11</sup>

This can become a problem for the intended framing when the screen doesn't match the filmed aspect ratio. One of the activities for this unit deals with this and what has to be taken into account when making a student film regarding how it will be presented. Most students are used to making Tik Toks or Instagram videos with their cell phones, thus the image is up and down, the screen being vertical instead of horizontal. Therefore, when that phone screen is transferred over to the TV screen, you have the tall narrow image with black on both sides for most of the screen width. The same thing has to be dealt with involving movies that show on the big screen vs. the movies on the television at home. Do you have black lines on the top and bottom to view in widescreen or do you change the aspect ratio to be full screen, but lose part of the left and right sides of the original film? How important are those parts? We often see this as an issue when we want to print a picture. If the picture is too long, it may print onto a second page or end up with a lot of white space along one edge of the paper. We have to consider, what you are missing if you don't have those edges on the screen when the aspect ratio to screen changes.

## **Composition and Design**

Filmmakers and 2-dimensional artists alike must pay special attention to lighting, shape, color, line, and texture and both of these art forms typically use a flat rectangular surface. Within Classical Cinema, the artists use these elements as a balance or equilibrium, though some filmmakers (like some 2D artists) will intentionally break the balance to emphasize different aspects and to “present us with an image that’s psychologically more appropriate to the dramatic context” of a scene, image, or film.<sup>12</sup> Since this unit focuses on realistic narrative, the scenery will not be fantastical, otherworldly, or imagined. The set will evoke and portray a real place, real people, and real situations. Therefore, the compositions will show this reality. That is not to say that the composition and design can’t be altered in the film, it is just that they won’t be going to very many extremes because compositional balance can be quite important when the purpose is realism. More often, light, shape, color, line, and texture will be used to draw attention to something specific that the filmmaker wants you to focus on, thus framing a shot to dictate what is important. Principles of Art, such as repetition, pattern, balance, movement, and contrast, may be used more pointedly in realistic narrative films. Using the elements and principles wisely will lead to better still shots and a better overall film.

## **Using Film in the Classroom**

### **Guiding Questions**

Why should film be used in the art room (or any classroom)? What are the ideological differences between educational videos, mainstream “tent pole” films, and films that offer “elevated understanding of all cinema” when used in the classroom?<sup>13</sup> How do films (and art) use the classical paradigm and realistic narratives? How can we use film to teach students how to properly use framing?

### **The Why of it All**

This unit strives to help students liberate themselves and aim for a positive future using film as the catalyst. According to Bergala, “The most beautiful films to show children are not those in which the filmmaker tries to protect them from the world...,” rather the child in the film “plays the role of buffer, intermediary, in this exposure to the world, to the evil in the world, to the incomprehensible.”<sup>14</sup> Directors have the ability to instruct child actors, integrating them in the realities of the world, “unprotected”, as they truly would be if it were a real life situation. Sometimes directors use real life situations and drop their entire story line into it, showing the reality of evils of the world while the actors themselves are assumed to be relatively safe. Exposing children to the evils of the real world through film allows them to experience the trauma second hand, the character confronting the world for them, keeping them safe while showing them how harsh reality can be. Having students relate to the adversity of others increases empathy and allows them to look at their own difficulties thoughtfully and intentionally. As well, students will be able to identify the choices that the youth in the films made and what their outcomes were and imagine what they might have been if the character had made a different choice. Through exposure to films that identify some of the difficulties that children face around the world, students will identify such things as ideology, story, and components of “mise en scene”. With the shared film experiences and a better understanding of what goes into a realistic narrative piece, as well as knowledge of setting the stage, students will use what they have learned in this unit (and others) to eventually create their short films that will be presented for their year-end final.

### **Ideological Differences between Film and Videos in the Classroom**

Most students are exceedingly familiar with modern movies in the theaters and on television. Some teachers

use movies as a “reward” or (far too often) to loosely relate to a lesson or unit in order to give students something “fun”, and then some teachers use movies as a teaching tool. In education we typically use cinema because it can capture the attention and imagination of students and because it is “immediately perceptible, visible, audible...”<sup>15</sup> With streaming services so easily accessible viewing movies has become increasingly simple but does not have to be increasingly useless. Because of the immediacy and wide range of stories and ideologies, films are an excellent way to introduce ideas in the classroom when used intentionally. Film must be a part of a greater whole, used to make connections and increase understanding through discussion and analysis. These connections can broaden students understanding and knowledge of the world at large and also open them up to new ways of experiencing and connecting with the world in the future. Films can provide the magic of enabling a student to be in and see our world in new ways.

In the classroom, we use educational videos such as *Bill Nye* or *Khan Academy* to provide layers and address different learning styles. These types of videos may be used as an introduction to what will be taught next, add supplemental information and ideas to what is already being taught, or to reiterate what’s been already taught. Educational videos are typically explicit with facts and stories, graphs and data, with clear purpose and intention.

Mainstream “tent pole” films, as described by Bergala, are the mainstay of major movie theaters today.<sup>16</sup> The DC vs. Marvel Multiverses are excellent examples of this, and create a “tent pole” city all their own. They are meant to excite and thrill, often bending the boundaries of good and evil. Each movie will generally end in a cliffhanger or, like Marvel movies, have extra snippets at the end giving a teaser for what will be coming to theaters near you in the future. Unlike more artistic films, “tent pole” films do not require a child-viewer to process information to understand the more complex issues presented. These films are also less likely to present real life issues, complications, and experiences, or a realistic world view, much less a real look at children and their real life experiences.

Artistic films that offer more elevated learning in the classroom, or films that teach, will stimulate curiosity and intuition differently and more intensely than “tent pole” films. Most students want high action, drama, and special effects, or the simple, easy to follow, storylines of the mainstream film; however, the category of film being used in this unit is more likely to make the student think, feel, contemplate, compare, contrast, and put themselves (mentally) in the shoes of the characters involved. Using artistic films in the classrooms allows students to increase their awareness of and responsiveness to the world outside of themselves. Bergala states that most often the classroom is the only place where students will be exposed to the implied lessons of film in this category, so these lessons may be understated.<sup>17</sup> Regardless, films such as *Daughters of the Dust* (1991 USA), *Where is the Friends House?* (1987 Iran) and *Wild Child* (1970 France) are more likely to offer elevated learning than the likes of any *Batman* or *Spiderman* movie when used in the classroom. Realistic narrative films operate through subtle and intentional use of mise en scene. Students can learn to bring their attention to how a film develops, how it looks, and how it makes them feel. That is the goal.

### **The Classical Paradigm and Realistic Narrative**

Most students at the high school level know that a good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. They may also know that the rising action, the climax, and the resolution are parts of the “classical paradigm” where a “narrative model is based on a conflict between a protagonist, who initiates the action, and the antagonist, who resists it.”<sup>18</sup> Within a realistic narrative, the story may follow the classical paradigm but is more likely to bury the “and then” within the story, with the series of events seeming more random and episodic than a life-ending problem after a life-ending problem to be dealt with, as is the way of a mainstream



action film. “Realists prefer loose, discursive plots...we dip into the story at an arbitrary point”, we then see a small slice of real life, and the film ends and life just goes on.<sup>19</sup> We don’t really know what comes next: maybe they live, maybe they die, maybe they go, and maybe they stay. We are left to wonder about what happens next on our own, not expecting a part two or an epilogue in most cases. Where the classical paradigm typically ends with a resolution of some kind, a realistic narrative often does not.

### **Suggested Films for Realistic Narrative**

The film *A Time for Drunken Horses* (Iran, 2000) is an excellent example of a realistic narrative and a paradigm, just not a classical paradigm.<sup>20</sup> As if living in a war-torn Kurdish village between Iraq and Iran wouldn’t offer enough rising action scene after scene, the main characters in this film are quickly orphaned and must find a way to survive and also obtain a life-saving surgery for their youngest sibling. As things are happening, one might think, “Ah, here is the solution!” but that solution, or the resolution of the classical paradigm, just never comes. This film follows more of a circular paradigm. The harsh realities of this film end with just more harsh realities for the viewer to contemplate. This film presents a persistence and drive that is mortifying and motivating at the same time. How could you live through all that, but also, how could you not try? That is reality.

*The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun* (Senegal, 1999) is a story about a young girl who truly knows her worth and isn’t afraid to stand up for herself.<sup>21</sup> Sili Laam is crippled by polio and lives with her blind grandmother who sits on the street singing and telling stories for money. Sili decides to sell the government-run newspaper, the *Soleil* (Sun in English), to make money to support herself and her grandmother despite being harassed, pushed around, and threatened by the street boys that see her as competition. One local boy sees more in her and becomes a guardian and a friend. Unlike some of the other realistic narratives, this film ends on a more positive note with the notion that Sili is going to be just fine. She’s a fighter and she will overcome.

*The Runner* (Iran, 1984) is an amazing story of a young boy, homeless and alone, living on an abandoned and beached ship, who starts out collecting trash at the local dump and moves up in the world with each new job he starts.<sup>22</sup> The young Amiro starts to collect bottles from the ocean (that uncaring tourists toss overboard from big cruise ships) until he is pushed around by a bigger boy and realizes he is being pushed out of the competition there. He decides to go solo selling cold water on the docks until he has to fight with and outwit a man who tries to steal his ice. He starts shining shoes where he is accused of stealing by an American tourist. Amiro does realize he needs to do something more with himself, so he enrolls in school to learn to read his beloved magazines about airplanes. Between his struggle to survive and the struggle to win in the wild competitions with the other boys in town, the film is sad, funny, and uplifting all at the same time. Most important is the look of the boy in his situation, a look that is framed in a *mise en scene* of extremes: fire, water, and desert.

There are many other realistic narrative films from all over the world that would be perfect for this unit. These are simply three out of the many viewed while creating this unit that stood out to this teacher as interesting and appropriate for high school students. Regardless of the film chosen, the teacher should always preview and prepare questions before showing a film. Finding specific spots to stop, talk about framing, aspect ratios, and *mise en scene* will be necessary.

## Strategies

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### **See. Think. Wonder.**

This strategy is pretty basic. It will rope in almost every student involved because your brain can't help but look at something and think something about it. The teacher invites students to simply "see, think, and wonder" about something shown to them. First, just look at the image, the clip, or the scene in question. Ask students to look at the image for a couple of minutes. Then ask students what they see, bit by bit. Break down the image. Anything and everything can be said. Next, what do they think about what they are seeing? Doing this as a class invites those that want to share time to speak up, and gives others who aren't sure what to say or don't want to speak in front of the class time to take in what others are thinking so as to compare it to their own thoughts. Finally, the teacher asks students what they wonder about the piece. If they need some inspiration the teacher can ask what they think happened in the timeline before or after the image. This gives students a chance to guess, imagine, and create meaning.

### **Four Formal Aspects of Art Analysis**

This is a step up from "See. Think. Wonder" and allows students a deeper reflection and introspection. Art analysis can be quite flexible. It may be used by more advanced students as well as lower-level students with just a bit of assistance. Art analysis can also be used as a second step after, "See. Think. Wonder." to expand on what students know. Both of these strategies are flexible and can be used as a whole group, small group, or one on one discussion. They can also both be utilized as a written assignment or graphic organizer.

1. Description- What do you see? Describe in detail.
2. Analysis- How did the artist do what they did? What elements and principles did they use? How did they use territorial space, contextual framing, and composition and design elements?
3. Interpretation- What is the artist trying to evoke with the piece in relation to framing?
4. Evaluation- What do you think of the piece? How do you feel about it? Was the artist successful at conveying a specific idea?

Working through this with students a few times will give most students the understanding and confidence they need to use it on almost any form of art on their own.

### **Differentiated Instruction: Open-ended projects**

In education, it is understood that different students learn in different ways. This is why differentiated instruction is of the utmost importance. Instruction is not the only thing that can be differentiated easily, projects and assignments can also be differentiated. Open-ended projects allow students to choose how they want to complete an assignment based on their own needs and interests. Inviting students to write down or draw their thoughts before coming back as a class for discussion for the Art Analysis is an easy way to allow differentiation and to give students time to think if they need it. On the final project for this unit, students will be given options as to how they wish to finish the project, as directed in the activity.

Regarding the unit instruction for integration, diversification, and meeting students' different learning styles, the unit will include films, discussions, time for reflections in words and drawings, viewing films from different cultures, and laying out some of the groundwork for students to create their short films (or artwork) later in

the year. Because of the complexities and harsh realistic situations, this unit may be emotionally charged for some students.

## Activities

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Mise en scene gives us quick information as to what a piece is about, regardless of whether it is a photo, a painting, or a film. What do you see? How is it arranged? What does it communicate to the audience? Quick and easy. But, there is more to it than that. A film can build an entire world using characters, sets, and lighting. When we look a bit deeper and analyze what we see, it can help us determine time, location, and even the theme of the narrative. For our activities we will look at and discuss contextual framing and how territorial space is used to define the contextual frame, aspect ratios and how they affect our viewing of films, and composition and design of a mise en scene.

### What Is In a Frame?

Students will be given materials to create a cut out of a picture frame, such as mat board or other sturdy material. We will use a standard 16:9 ratio of most televisions being sold today, this is about 1.8:1. Aspect ratios can be discussed here or saved for later. We will use an inner rectangle of 10  $\frac{3}{4}$  inches by 6 inches as our framed image size. Have students hold their frame up to frame a picture, which in a movie is the frame. Confusing, right? Just be sure they understand the picture frame is going to be used to hold an image while in a movie, a still shot is called a “frame”. Students should take a little time to walk around with their frame to visualize things from different angles and different distances. Ask students to extend and bring in their arm to show how the zoom in and out works, which is like a camera zoom. Ask students to focus on one item, zoom in and out and change the point of view thinking of the contextual frame and aspect ratios and how these things could affect the mise en scene of the final image they are trying achieve. How can students make that item stand out versus being more inconspicuous or just being a part of the general surroundings such as the horse and carriage shown previously? Stations will be set up to have students interpret and frame specific things, such as with a still life. Students will be asked to sketch and photograph what they see through their picture frames. This is an exercise to get their frames ready for future use as well as getting them to understand how a director looks at the world they are filming.

### Aspect Ratios Activity 1

In our modern world we watch videos on all sorts of devices. From movie theaters or drive in’s, televisions of all shapes and sizes, iPads, and cell phones, we watch movies, films, Youtube videos, and TikToks. But how does aspect ratio actually affect an individual frame when seen in different formats? For this activity students will be shown a frame from a film in different aspect ratios on as many different device sizes as possible or even just changing the aspect ratio on a TV, computer, or phone screen. Explaining aspect ratios doesn’t have to get complicated or mathematical for this activity. Rtings.com has an excellent page (listed in resources) to help out. Two sections, “What does it look like?” and “How to get rid of them”, are particularly helpful.

What is lost on the frame on different screens in different aspect ratios is easy enough to recognize when comparing aspect ratios for yourself. After the class walks through a few frames from different short video

clips as a class, students will begin to understand the differences if given a little background. The important part is not memorizing the ratios or even really mathematically understanding the differences (though this could be a helpful art/math integration piece). The idea is that some directors are very particular and specific about framing and the aspect ratio differences on different screens can actually alter the film in some instances. After creating small groups, each group will be given an image. If it were placed on different screens in the different aspect ratios what, if anything, would be lost physically and/or psychologically? For example, consider a character looking at something on the edge of the screen that can also be seen by the viewer. Does the aspect ratio change what the character is seeing (or now not seeing if the item is cut off?) Has something of importance been cut off from the viewer? What does the altered image lose in value, theme, or purpose with the screen change as an individual frame compare to a short video clip or the entire film? Everything they have learned about mise en scene comes into play in this activity with framing, zooms, angles,

## **Aspect Ratio Activity 2**

During this unit two films will be shown in class. This activity can use a film that has already been seen or a film can be chosen and viewed specifically for this activity. A previously chosen short clip from the film is shown as a refresher and discussion piece. The class will discuss the framing and mise en scene during its replay with the volume muted or paused, as needed. However, students will take a close look at the parts of the frame that they know will be cut off in different aspect ratios and discuss any issues. Finally, one frame from that clip is viewed and small groups will work together to express the differences.

The “See. Think. Wonder.” strategy can be integrated into this entire activity. This activity can also be used as a writing exercise or sketching exercise to meet different learning styles within the class. The math aspect of ratios could also be used with this activity for further arts integration in a lesson. The outcomes of this activity are for students to understand how important framing is and how the aspect ratio of a screen can affect some films in surprising and sometimes negative ways.

## **Video Viewing and Art Analysis**

Students will view a film with the four formal aspects of art analysis in mind: description, analysis, interpretation, evaluation. Specific stops will be made during film, planned in advance, to pause and have a group discussion about the steps in the four formal aspects of art analysis (from strategies) regarding specific film still-frames. Students will have a 4 square for the analysis with the words and questions on it. This will allow students to organize thoughts and ideas, take notes, and separate the steps visually. Stopping to talk about a still, students will also get a better understanding of mise en scene in terms framing and design. When the film ends students will then immediately write an art analysis on paper about the films as a whole, individually or in small groups, to demonstrate their understanding of art analysis. Working through this will also allow students to see the four elements of mise en scene mentioned before: staging the action, physical setting and décor, the manner in which these materials are all framed, and the manner in which they are photographed (or filmed in this case).

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hitchcock and Gottlieb, 142. *Hitchcock on Hitchcock. Selected Writings and Interviews*. University of California Press, 2015.

<sup>2</sup>Giannetti, 47. *Understanding Movies*. Green Integer, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 53.

<sup>5</sup> Tulsaschools.org

<sup>6</sup>Giannetti, 48. *Understanding Movies*. Green Integer, 1997.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 285.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>9</sup> Bresson, 10 *Notes on Cinematography*. 1975.

<sup>10</sup> Horse and Carriage photo, <https://unsplash.com/photos/O3k9IRYGRbA>.

<sup>11</sup> Rtings.com

<sup>12</sup>Giannetti, 61. *Understanding Movies*. Green Integer, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Bergala, 53. *The Cinema Hypothesis: Teaching Cinema in the Classroom and beyond*. Österreichisches Film museum, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 56

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 50

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 53

<sup>18</sup> Giannetti, 338. *Understanding Movies*. Green Integer, 1997.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 344

<sup>20</sup> A Time for Drunken Horses

<sup>21</sup> The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun

## Appendix of Movies/TV Referenced

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Batman (USA, 1989)

Bill Nye: The Science Guy

Blade Runner (USA, 1982)

Blancanieves (Spain, 2012) PG-13

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Children of Men (USA, 2006)

Daughters of the Dust (1991 USA)

Edward Scissorhands (USA, 1990)

Khan Academy

The Little Girl Who Sold the Sun (Senegal, 1999) NR

Metropolis (Germany, 1927)

The Revenant (USA, 2015)

The Runner (Iran, 1984) NR

Spiderman (USA, 2002)

Spirited Away (Japan, 2001)

Turtles Can Fly (Iran, 2004) PG-13

Where is the Friends House? (Iran, 1987) NR

Wild Child (France, 1970) G

## Appendix on Implementing District Standards

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### Oklahoma State Fine Art Standards

#### VA.CP.1: *Creative Process*

Learn and use vocabulary and concepts related to visual arts.

Many of the vocabulary words used in fine arts for 2D and 3D work are the same as those used to teach film. Students will use the vocabulary they learn within this unit's activities as well as later in the year when they create their own films.

#### VA.CHP.1: *Cultural and Historical Perspectives*

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

Using foreign films gives students the chance to analyze different cultures and historical contexts to make connections to contemporary and local contexts. This really does give students the chance to see "how the other half lives".

#### VA.ARCM.1: *Aesthetic Response and Critique Methodologies*

Perceive, analyze, interpret, and evaluate artistic work.

In this unit students will do all of these steps. Viewing, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating the films we use will help students to develop a personal artistic style to create a film of their own. Students will

## Resources

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Rtings.com. *What is the Aspect Ratio?* <https://www.rtings.com/tv/learn/what-is-the-aspect-ratio> 4-3-16-9-21-9

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<https://teachers.yale.edu>

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