

## FOREWORD

The history of film is inexorably tied to the history of technology. There is a legendary, possibly apocryphal, story that an 1896 screening of one of the earliest films, *The Arrival of the Train*, caused a panic when the audience, unfamiliar with the concept of moving images, thought the train was going to crash into them. Developments in technology continued to affect audiences with the creation of synchronized sound in the 1920s, the widespread use of Technicolor™ in the 1930s and 1940s, the popularization of the 3D films of the 1950s, and the reliance on computer graphics, green-screen technology, and the newest 3D capabilities of today's films.

But maybe even more important than the developments in how films are *made* are the changing ways in which they are *viewed*. From the five-cent nickelodeons running a continuous reel of short films at the beginning of the 20th century to the \$10 matinee, Dolby® Surround sound, and stadium theaters of the 21st century, movie theaters have been fighting a losing battle to other places where audiences can watch movies. The advent of VHS and DVR players with high-definition televisions and digital broadcasting allows us to recreate—or even replace—much of the theater experience at home. Yet because these developments in living-room-theater technology have taken place over a span of more than 50 years, nothing could have prepared us for the lightning-quick changes in how we view film that have been caused by the digital revolution of just the past 10 years.

Consider the following list of technological developments, now ubiquitous, that did not exist in 2004, the year this guide, *Film in the Classroom*, was

first published: YouTube, Facebook, Netflix, Hulu, Twitter, the iPod and iPad, and cell phones with built-in cameras and online video streaming. Suddenly, we have gone from experiencing film mostly in theaters and our living rooms to viewing videos on the bus, at our desks, and in line at the bank. Kids born in the last decade also have no concept of not being able to see *what you want when you want it, as often as you want it*. And now, we have the unprecedented ability, through social networking sites and increased bandwidth, to share and comment on what we're watching with others, regardless of the geographical, social, gender, and age distances between us.



MOVIE THEATER, 1953, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

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Not only has technology changed how and where we view film, but it has also changed who gets to make films. With a cell phone and the most basic video-editing software, anyone can be a filmmaker. Video sharing sites give us immediate access to an audience, mostly bypassing the traditional gatekeepers of film production and distribution. Spend a few minutes on YouTube and you'll see that the great majority of the material is user-generated, noncommercial product, often made in response to others' work, and in many cases annotating existing work with textual and visual comments and links to outside sources.



Dimitry Lobanov, Shutterstock Images.

You'll probably notice, too, that most of the consumers and creators of the "new media" are young people. While it has become clear that teenagers, in particular, are leading rich digital lives outside of school—by blogging, sharing videos, and social-networking—it is becoming increasingly clear that, ironically, schools often ask them to check those technology skills at the classroom door. With Internet blocks and outdated technology or the lack of it, our classrooms, like many of our school buildings and educational philosophies, resemble the 19th more than the 21st century.

So what is the result? By not incorporating the realities of our students' digital experiences into our curriculum, we have largely abandoned our students to a cyberworld that is for the most part unmonitored and where the rules of conduct are often unclear, and we cannot provide them the skills that they really need to be successful and literate global citizens. The National Council of Teachers of English has identified these "21st Century Literacies":

- Develop proficiency with the tools of technology;
- Build relationships with others to pose and solve problems collaboratively and cross-culturally;
- Design and share information for global communities to meet a variety of purposes;
- Manage, analyze, and synthesize multiple streams of simultaneous information;
- Create, critique, analyze, and evaluate multimedia texts;
- Attend to the ethical responsibilities required by these complex environments.

Any teacher reading this now will probably say, "Great. I'll just go ahead and balance these with my state standards, school expectations, oh, and with my state text and the Common Core Standards, too, right?" Luckily, these are not standards or assessments or brand-new technology skills for teachers to learn, but are only descriptors of the expectations students should have for the kind of work they are asked to do in school.

And for me, that brings us back to film. When teachers are using film *actively* in the classroom, they are touching on many of the skills identified above. As you will see throughout this wonderfully practical and insightful teacher's guide, students are asked to critically analyze the "multiple streams of simultaneous information" as well as to "create . . . multimedia texts" such as screenplays and storyboards for their own film projects by developing "proficiency with the tools of technology."

In no way does this guide promote extended “movie days,” with long class periods dedicated to passive viewing of a film. Active film engagement means taking full advantage of the pause and rewind buttons on a DVD player to allow time for critical comment and discussion. Using the treasure trove of MASTERPIECE films as its basis, and with numerous opportunities to expand to other films, this guide makes a connection between the film and print mediums by giving students the language to talk about, understand, and create film in sophisticated and revealing ways. As Carol Jackson Cashion points out in her recent article for the *English Journal*, “[MASTERPIECE at 40: A Celebration](#),” the MASTERPIECE films have long been a staple in our classrooms, not just because teachers and students are eager to discover how filmmakers imagine the works of great literature are transformed to film, but also because they open up “dialogue between the printed page and the screen” and they ask students to become “active interpreters and critics.” \*

To those who might suggest that schools should not capitulate to the vagaries of society’s “infatuation” with technology, but instead focus on the lasting contributions of print literature, this guide provides a perfect marriage between the two: classic film and print texts that are explored through the new literacies. While it’s impossible to say what changes technology will bring next—my personal prediction of on-demand video streaming under closed eyelids still seems a little way off—it is essential that our classrooms continue to be responsive to the real-life needs of our students in the 21st century. And film, by connecting students’ in- and out-of-school literacies, seems like an ideal place to start. ∞

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Courtesy of John Golden.

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\* Cashion, Carol Jackson. “Masterpiece at 40: A Celebration,” *English Journal* 100 (4) March 2011, 15–19.