

LITERARY ELEMENTS

Characterization

...Modernizing and making [the story] fresh was really about thinking about the characters and why they did what they did, why they said what they said, why they loved who they loved, why they hated who they hated.

—SARAH PHELPS, WRITER FOR OLIVER TWIST *

In a film, how do we get to know a character? We register who he or she is, often without even realizing it, by taking in close-ups of the actor's face, his or her facial expressions, or the music playing in the background. Other elements, such as the character's age, size, dress, speech, how he or she moves, etc., also influence our understanding. We may perceive on first viewing that a character is dangerous by the harsh or darkened lighting on the actor's face, by the reaction shot that shows another character's fear or uncertainty, and by the ominous sounds on the soundtrack.

Simple things like camera angles or movement can telegraph a great deal about a character's feelings and personality. The first time young David is alone with his evil new stepfather in *David Copperfield*, the camera shoots Mr. Murdstone from a low angle so we see from David's point of view what a huge, threatening presence he is. Similarly, when Jane Eyre first meets Mr. Brocklehurst, the clergyman who will take her to Lowood, he is shot from a low angle to emphasize his power over her. In *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, the camerawork highlights Mr. Chips's nervousness and insecurity as a new teacher by posing him against the grandeur of the buildings, spying on him through

windows, and watching him from behind. In *Bleak House*, the inventive use of a perceptual distortion technique called a dolly zoom makes us feel what Esther Summerson feels as, from her point of view, we seem to “zoom” toward the terrible Miss Barbary, who seems to get larger as she berates the young girl.

Similarly, costume choices can give us far more information than we're probably aware of. The bright green, inappropriately lavish hat the filmmakers give Mrs. Van Damn when she first comes to live in the tiny, dark attic in *The Diary of Anne Frank* signals the brash presence she'll have in the film. In the 2009 film adaptation of *Emma*, the first words we hear in the opening voice-over are: “Emma Woodhouse was born with the sun shining”—a version of the famous original first line—and for the rest of the film Emma is nearly always seen in dresses of red, yellow, pink, and orange hues, costumes that make her ebullient, headstrong personality stand out even more.



EMMA (ROMOLA GARAI)

* In “A New Twist on Oliver Twist” feature on the DVD.

ACTIVITIES

Use the activities below to understand how characters are portrayed on the page and in film.

1. Choose a major character in a film to analyze as you watch. Notice the things you would notice in a novel—this person’s behavior, actions, gestures, appearance, dialogue, and feelings, and how other characters react to him or her. But notice also what the language of film tells you about this person: How is he or she lit? What is the character wearing? How does the director physically situate this person in relation to other characters? Keep a chart in which you take notes on these aspects and any others that occur to you as you watch. For example, because we watch the main character in *David Copperfield* grow up over the course of the film, first Daniel Radcliffe and then Ciaran McMenamin must portray David at different ages. See if you can identify the many ways the director managed to keep a sense of continuity of character regardless of these changes. Or keep track of how contrasts in characters play off each other. In *Sense and Sensibility*, the filmmakers use all the tools at their disposal to contrast the sisters Elinor and Marianne, who represent, respectively, the “sense” and “sensibility” of the title.
2. What does the way a character is introduced for the first time in a film tell us about who that person is? Our first meeting with the 21st-century Sherlock Holmes in *Sherlock* starts with the sound of a zipper in darkness, so that when we first see him, we realize the camera is looking up at his avid face as if from inside a body bag in a morgue. The shot speaks volumes about a man so thrilled by “the science of deduction” that he exclaims, “Four serial suicides! Ah...it’s Christmas!”
3. Although filmed in a much more traditional style, the first several shots in *Silas Marner* give us a similar degree of information about the main character, played by Ben Kingsley. With long and unwavering close-ups on his face as he works and sings in church, the camera seems to scrutinize and judge him, preparing us for the key event that sets the stage for the rest of plot: Silas is accused, falsely, of theft and cast out of his Calvinist community. Similarly, in another George Eliot work, *Adam Bede*, the first two scenes introduce Hetty Sorrell in a way that telescopes the plot of the entire novel: our first view of a haggard woman in a courtroom as she is sentenced to death for the murder of her child is followed by a scene in her earlier life as, in a close-up of her arresting face and long wavy hair, she slowly eats a ripe berry. Compare how a character is introduced in a film with his or her introduction in a literary work. What are the differences? Which do you think is stronger?
4. Test how well an actor makes clear what is going on in the mind of his or her character by writing the interior monologue of this character during a scene in which this person is quiet. For example, you might watch the famous scenes toward the end of *Anna Karenina* as Anna’s thoughts race madly and she goes to the station to find Count Vronsky, just before she throws herself under the train. Try to make your version of her internal thoughts match the way the director uses tilting camera angles in these scenes to show how “off kilter” she is. Next, read your monologue aloud with the sound turned



ELINOR DASHWOOD (HATTIE MORAHAN) AND MARIANNE DASHWOOD (CHARITY WAKEFIELD)

down during the scene. Or flip this exercise, and take an internal monologue from a work of literature and read it aloud while a partner tries to convey these feelings through action.

5. Bring character analysis into the 21st century and learn about the art of interior monologue at the same time: Choose a major character from one of the MASTERPIECE films, select a picture and a username of some kind to represent him or her, then create a Twitter account from which you tweet the character's "thoughts." For instance, a great deal of the growth of the main character in *Emma* takes place through internal monologue as she wrestles with her own nature and feelings. Take a scene from the book (for example, chapter 16, a short chapter that is almost entirely interior monologue) and try to convert Emma's thoughts into tweets written in contemporary language. Someone else in the class might do the same for other characters in the novel, such as Mr. Knightley, Harriet, or Mr. Elton. Finally, view the MASTERPIECE version of the scene to see how the filmmakers handled it. (For an example of how this might be done, you might check out [SuchTweetSorrow](#), a Twitter project by the Royal Shakespeare Company in which six characters tweet the story of *Romeo and Juliet* over five weeks.)
6. In small groups, cast the major characters in a literary work you are reading by making a list of important traits for each one, then selecting a well-known actor who could portray those traits successfully. Who, in your opinion, would be hopelessly miscast in these roles? Now view a film version. What do you and/or your group think of the casting choices that were actually made? Why?
7. How does interesting casting challenge the way we see classic roles? For instance, Cokey Giedroye, director of the 2009 film version of *Oliver Twist*, purposely used an actor for Oliver who didn't speak "like he's been to Eton," unlike the Olivers of previous productions. Writer Sarah Phelps wanted a "black or mixed-race Nancy," since many period dramas have all-white casts that are not always true to the era. In what ways might your casting choices for a classic work help an audience see it anew? *
8. One hallmark of classic literature is that the characters seem deeply human and multifaceted—the very opposite of "stock" characters. Yet the most accomplished actors manage to show this depth in subtle ways. For example, Anne Frank's mother, played by Tamsin Greig in *The Diary of Anne Frank*, has relatively few lines in the film, yet looms as a tragic presence because the actress is able to communicate so much through the character's posture, facial expressions, and imploring eyes. Which characters in the film you are viewing are the most complex? Why? How does the filmmaker show this complexity?



EDITH FRANK (TAM SIN GREIG)

* In "A New Twist on *Oliver Twist*" feature on the DVD.

9. How do filmmakers bring to life even minor characters? In an [interview](#), *David Copperfield* director Simon Curtis commented on the joys of



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DIRECTOR SIMON CURTIS

casting this film: “Every single character in Dickens has something about him or her that’s very actable. Even if it’s just a one-line part, every character has a back story and a life.” Try to imagine a “back story and a life” for one of the vivid secondary characters in

a novel you are reading by creating a mock social networking page for him or her. Who would his or her “friends” be? What interests would the character advertise? What would a typical “status update” be? Then try acting this role. How does imagining a back story help bring this character to life?

10. Write, role-play, or film a mock interview with a character from a book in which this person speaks about how he or she was portrayed in the film. How does this person feel about the actor who was cast? The way he or she was costumed? How important lines were delivered? What about aspects of the book that were cut? For instance, how might the “real” Aunt Betsey Trotwood from *David Copperfield* feel about her portrayal by Maggie Smith?
11. A series of theater exercises in [Our Town: A Companion Guide for Teachers](#) takes actors from first read-through to rehearsal and opening night, with interesting suggestions for how to experiment with tone and staging to bring surprise to character interpretation. Adapt these for any other classic drama, or to experiment with a Reader’s Theater version of a scene from any literary work.

12. Actor Ian McKellen says, in a [video interview](#) about playing the nasty Mr. Creakle in *David Copperfield*, “Often the villains are the best part.” And no one writes villains more deliciously than Dickens. Take, for instance, Mr. Quilp from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, described by Dickens as

...an elderly man of remarkably hard features and forbidding aspect, and so low in stature as to be quite a dwarf, though his head and face were large enough for the body of a giant. His black eyes were restless, sly, and cunning;...and his complexion was one of that kind which never looks clean or wholesome. But what added most to the grotesque expression of his face, was a ghastly smile, which...constantly revealed the few discoloured fangs that were yet scattered in his mouth, and gave him the aspect of a panting dog. His dress consisted of a large high-crowned hat, a worn dark suit, a pair of capacious shoes, and a dirty white neckerchief sufficiently limp and crumpled to disclose the greater portion of his wiry throat. Such hair as he had, was of a grizzled black, cut short and straight upon his temples, and hanging in a frowzy fringe about his ears. His hands...were very dirty; his finger-nails were crooked, long, and yellow.

How would you bring this description to life? How does the filmmaker do it? How, especially, are Quilp’s odd oral fixations portrayed?

13. Certain universal character “types” are instantly recognizable, no matter what century or culture they appear in—the comically nervous father in *Emma*, the social-climbing Mrs. Van Hopper in *Rebecca*, the inspiring yet unorthodox teacher in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, the womanizer Henry Crawford in *Mansfield Park*. What characters in classic works can you name who would be instantly



Courtesy of ITV.

MR. CHIPS (MARTIN CLUNES)

recognizable to a 21st-century audience because they are a “type” that is universal? In what other films or books do versions of these types appear?

Themes, Motifs, & Symbols

In most of the literature presented in MASTERPIECE productions, the “big” themes—love, honor, betrayal, family, evil, revenge, death, deception, class, race, and gender—are explored. Filmmakers choose to make films of these works, many of which are hundreds of years old, because they believe that they still have relevance for a contemporary audience. As Allan Cubitt, screenwriter of *Anna Karenina*, put it in [an interview](#), “I wanted to do something that had the capacity to speak directly to a modern audience about their lives, their love affairs, or their difficult marriages, and not to make a piece that is enjoyable simply because it shows how people used to live.”

Film must bring home a theme in myriad small, subtle ways, and everything from the lighting to the makeup must enhance it. For example, *The Mill on the Floss* is, in many ways, the story of “twos”—of shifting alliances and pairings in a rural English village. The director emphasizes this so subtly that we barely notice it, but if you were to make a list of how many scenes feature two people alone, lit and staged to emphasize their particular relationship, you would find such scenes occur throughout the film.

Directors are always looking for an image that can be a metaphor for a theme—something dramatic and visual that will bring home the overall message, sometimes on a level that may not even register consciously with viewers. When this image is repeated, it becomes a motif or symbol in the film that reminds the viewers of an important idea. Captive birds are used as a visual symbol to show the hold General Tilney has over his daughter and sons in *Northanger Abbey*. In *Wuthering Heights*, there are frequent shots of windows, and of people looking in at others from outside or looking out from within. This motif strengthens the theme of being inside, loved, part of a family (like Cathy) versus being outside, abandoned, an orphan (like Heathcliff). The film version of *Little Dorrit* emphasizes the symbolic images of Arthur Clennam’s button and the pocket watch his father gave

him by showing what they represent to different characters. The first line of the film of *Middlemarch* is “Look: the future,” while the political slogan “Progress and Reform” is repeated regularly, and Lydgate and Dorothea—the main characters, and both agents of “progress and reform”—are initially linked by scenes in which each is shown drawing plans for new buildings that will embody their own reform ideas. In *Jane Eyre*, the motif of drawing and painting—and its relationship to Jane’s imagination and place in the world—is emphasized literally from the unexpected image that opens the film to the satisfying scene that closes it. Each of these is an example of meaningful repetition that we might not notice if we are not aware of how filmmakers use thematic patterns.



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ACTIVITIES

These activities can help students understand the interrelated concepts of theme, symbol and motif as they play out both film and literature.

1. The opening scenes in both film and literature are extremely important in establishing theme. After you have read a work or watched a film, talk about some of the important themes in it, then go back and revisit the opening. In how many ways did the author or filmmaker establish these themes right from the start? What do you notice now that you didn't notice the first time? For example, see the first four minutes and fifteen seconds of Andrew Davies's arresting version of *Sense and Sensibility*, examined in detail in *The Language of Film* (see page 9).



ATTORNEY AND CLIENT: FORTITUDE AND IMPATIENCE BY PHIZ (ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION FOR BLEAK HOUSE, 1853)

You may also want to view the first fifteen minutes or so of *Bleak House*, and note the various ways the filmmakers make clear that “Jarndyce and Jarndyce” (a lawsuit “so complicated that no man alive knows what it means,” Dickens wrote in chapter 1 of the novel) has the power to determine the lives of every character in the novel.

2. Notice as you watch a film how certain images, objects, colors, scenes, or sounds are repeated often or are lingered over by the camera. If you begin to notice repetition of any kind, make a list of when and how you see it as you continue to watch.

What do you think the filmmaker was trying to say by doing this? Don't forget to note repetitious sounds as well. For example, the role of sound from the outside world in *The Diary of Anne Frank* is very important: though viewers will certainly notice the bombs that go off, they may miss the fact that knocks on the door function throughout as terrifying reminders of what is unknown about what the outside world might bring. In *The Turn of the Screw*, the sound of the two children whispering is repeated multiple times, and each time, as the story rises to its dramatic conclusion, it seems less innocent.

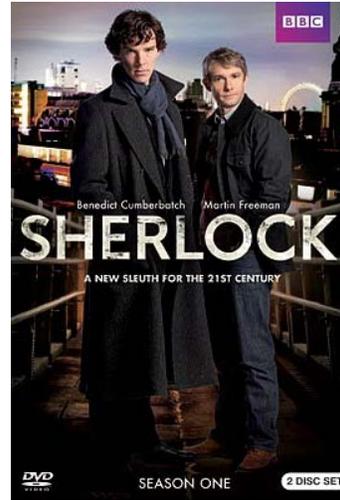
3. Play filmmaker. What visual image or images might you choose to represent a theme in a literary work you are currently reading? If you like, make a montage of these images with a video camera. For instance, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a kind of fairy tale made vivid by dramatic contrasts, especially between innocent youth and corrupt age. Dickens said about writing the book, “I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of a child with grotesque and wild but not impossible companions...” How does the film constantly contrast the “innocent face and pure intentions” of Little Nell with the “strange,” “uncongenial,” or “grim”?



ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATION BY GEORGE CATTERMOLLE FOR THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP, 1841

4. Switch genres. How would the theme of the book or film you're studying be portrayed in a contemporary soap opera? A rap song? A newspaper article? A comic strip? A video game? Try writing a version or description.

5. Write the script for or role-play a talk show on a theme common to one or more works you have been studying. “Invite” characters, authors, filmmakers, actors, etc. to weigh in on the topic.
6. List five details from a film that show a particular theme. Then list five from the same literary work, or from a work that shares the same theme. (These details can include props, dialogue, description, music, some aspect of setting, etc.) Which details work best to convey the theme for you? Why?
7. Take the bare bones of the premise, plot, or theme of a novel or film and brainstorm a list of other stories that share it. Why do you think this is such an enduring premise? For example, the premise “Someone new comes to stay in an isolated place with which legends and mysteries are associated. This person’s life and/or sanity is threatened” could fit many films of the mystery, suspense, or horror genres, including *Rebecca* and *The Turn of the Screw*.
8. Make connections between a literary work or film and the “real world.” Bring several newspapers to class and find as many parallels and connections with the story as you can. Use both images and words, and find thematic connections as well as connections to character, setting, mood, and genre. For example, you might take Anne Frank’s contention that “In spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart” and find evidence for or against that contention in a daily edition of a national newspaper.
9. Make a movie poster or print ad for a book or film in which something important about its theme is clear, but which is also eye-catching and appealing. You might also choose one significant line from the film or novel to use in your ad. You could also create a title sequence for your film that telegraphs important information about it. Two interesting but very different examples from the MASTERPIECE collection are: a) the title sequences that begin the Sherlock series, which shows a speeded-up and miniaturized view of London and its traffic, cut with “detecting” images, such as fluid under a microscope; and b) the title sequence for



DVD COVER FOR SHERLOCK

A Tale of Two Cities, which has black-and-white revolutionary images with a soundtrack of martial music. How important on screen are opening design elements such as the choice of the font, the color of the letters, the movement of the title sequence, and other aspects?

FAMOUS FIRST LINES

How are the famous first lines, below, represented in each of the MASTERPIECE films that re-envision the literary work they’re from? In some cases, the lines are never literally said but are simply illustrated throughout; in other cases, as in the famous first line from *A Tale of Two Cities*, they are used surprisingly.

- *It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.* (A Tale of Two Cities)
- *Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.* (Anna Karenina)
- *Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show.* (David Copperfield)
- *Emma Woodhouse, handsome, clever, and rich, with a comfortable home and happy disposition, seemed to unite some of the best blessings of existence; and had lived nearly twenty-one years in the world with very little to distress or vex her.* (Emma)
- *There was no possibility of taking a walk that day.* (Jane Eyre)

You might use these lines as jumping-off points for your own screenplays or films, or find other works of literature or film that also illustrate them.

Setting

Although setting is often the aspect of narrative that viewers take most for granted, a great deal of painstaking work goes into creating sets, props, costumes, and makeup that are both historically accurate and dramatic. We can see that by looking at two films in particular: *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Our Town*.

In *The Diary of Anne Frank*, the secret annex in which the two families live for two years is so important to the plot that it almost functions as another character. Not only did the set designers have to get the period details right and remain faithful to both the descriptions in Anne’s diary and to the physical place itself (which visitors can still see today), but they also had to capture the metaphorical conflicts of the physical space: for the inhabitants, it was both a blessed refuge and a claustrophobic prison. Time and again, for instance, the filmmakers show us a low-angle shot of the narrow stairs, hidden behind a bookcase, that lead up to where the families hide. This shot emphasizes the flimsy distance between the refugees and the world that would persecute them, but it also shows how physically inadequate the space was for eight people. Similarly, many of the shots on the main floors of the attic are through windows covered in a pretty but transparent lace, emphasizing how little privacy the inhabitants had, but how the space was still home. The scenes between Peter and Anne under the eaves at the very top of the house are shot to give viewers a feeling of the comparative “breathing room” the teenagers found there.

By contrast, *Our Town* is, famously, a play for which Thornton Wilder’s stage directions simply say: “No curtain. No scenery. The audience, arriving, sees an empty stage in half-light.” The bareness of the stage and the simplicity of the costumes and props serve to enhance his notion that this is a play about universal themes—those things, Wilder said, that “repeat and repeat and repeat in the lives of millions.” Indeed, Paul Newman and Joanne Woodward said they were originally interested in being involved in the play soon after 9/11, and they thought that simplicity would resonate particularly well.

ACTIVITIES

Use these exercises to discover just how much setting can reveal.

1. What does a filmmaker’s use of setting say about the people and the society the story depicts? To investigate, you might team up with a history class to watch a film and make a long list of everything you can find that depicts a particular setting or milieu (for instance, working-class life in Victorian England). Include social, cultural, political, and historical aspects—the details of everyday life, work, class, gender, race, politics, customs, styles, leisure-time activities, inventions, famous people, sport, food, etc.—that define a time and place. Then form small groups and make observations from this list of details about the culture and values of the people who lived in this time and place. What was important to them? What connoted status? What were the society’s taboos? Which groups had power? Which groups didn’t? What other conclusions can you draw? Finally, think about how we should judge a film like this that depicts a time and place different from our own: Should we judge it by today’s standards or try to view it with the mindset of the period about which it was made?



- Before you see a film, draw or create a diorama of a historical aspect that must be gotten absolutely right. If you have online access, you may want to use online tools like [Glogster](#) to create a multimedia poster or [Museum Box](#) to bring the diorama into the 21st century. You will have to research the item first. For example, you might design the parlor of a house in a Jane Austen novel, or the costume that a young woman might have worn to the ball in *Anna Karenina*. Now watch the film to see how the set or costume designer interpreted this same aspect.



peterjef, Shutterstock Images.

THE YORKSHIRE MOORS

- Play with the idea of setting, whether to confront a problem in the original text, to emphasize the symbolic role of place, or to find a new setting that highlights some of the themes and ideas in an interesting way. In *Wuthering Heights* the filmmakers visually contrast the wild, natural world in which Heathcliff is at ease with the staid parlor life led by Edgar and Isabella Linton. For instance, Heathcliff emerges from emerald green hedges to look through the windows of the Grange and spy on Cathy and the Lintons in a parlor in which nearly every piece of furniture is white. If you were making a film of a work you are currently reading, or if you were making a new version of a film you have recently seen, consider how the significance of certain settings could be emphasized. Where else could the story be set? Why and how would that setting work? What would have to be adapted? What do you think of famous reworkings of classic texts like *Emma* transplanted to southern California in the 1990s in *Clueless*?
- View various film treatments of the same setting and compare and contrast them. For instance, you could pair *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* with other stories of private boys' schools (*The Emperor's Club*, *Dead Poets Society* and so on), or look at the London of one of the Dickens films and that of the modern-day *Sherlock*. Make a list of several images that appear in both and that seem to represent this time and place in many films. What do you think these images stand for?
- Choose a film or work of literature for which setting is as important as it is in *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Describe the setting as if it were a person. What traits does it have? Which character in the story does it most resemble? How does it highlight the themes of the story?
- Teaming up with a history class, choose a historical topic that is significant to a film or literary work you are studying (for example, child labor in *David Copperfield*, the changes the railroad brought to rural communities in *Middlemarch*, or World War I in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*). Imagine you are a history consultant to the film. Write a memo to the director in which you recommend ways to make the portrayal of this topic realistic or detailed. If you've already seen the film, write a review that analyzes the historical issues or accuracy of this topic.
- "Establishing" shots often go unnoticed by viewers but are key elements of the plot, especially in the kind of sprawling epics featured in MASTERPIECE films and in many of the Austen and Dickens novels. Often these shots are of the great (or humble) homes in which the characters live.

Trish Steel, Wikimedia Commons.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Great_Chalfield_Manor_12.jpg



GREAT CHALFIELD MANOR, WILTSHIRE (FILMING LOCATION USED IN PERSUASION)

Choose a house to track throughout an Austen or Dickens film to see how the filmmaker portrays the grounds and house. In what types of weather is it often shown? What do its décor, upkeep, and degree of grandness tell you about the social status and personalities of its inhabitants? How?

An interesting fact students might enjoy knowing is that, in order to save both time and money, the filmmakers of *Bleak House* decided to base themselves at one house for shooting, and production designer Simon Elliott then transformed its interior so that “you could pass from room to room, moving seamlessly from Chesney Wold to Bleak House to Tulkinghorn’s office and Kenge’s chambers. Upstairs in the eaves, the garrets above Krook’s shop were taking shape. Here Miss Flite and her birds would live and Nemo would die.” (For more Production Notes, go to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/bleakhouse/notes.html>.)

Andrew Smith, Wikimedia Commons.
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ingatestone_Hall\(JohnSturner\)May2003.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Ingatestone_Hall(JohnSturner)May2003.jpg)



INGATESTONE HALL, ESSEX (EXTERIOR OF BLEAK HOUSE)

Point of View

Exploring the use of point of view in film is very different from exploring its use in literature. In a novel, everything we learn about is filtered through a point of view—either one we trust or one that is unreliable. In a film, there are various points of view:

Subjective: The character’s point of view is usually established with a series of eye-line matches and reaction shots. For instance, we might see the character looking around, cut to a huge elephant running towards him, and then cut to the character’s reaction. This shot can assist the director in creating sympathy for the character, and to “suture” the audience to the action and/or characters on screen.

Authorial: This point of view cannot be attributed to any one character, but is provided by the director (or screenwriter) giving the audience information directly. For instance, in the example above, we might see a character looking around everywhere but behind him, then see a huge elephant running towards him, then cut back to the man, who is completely unaware of what is happening. Another way to establish this would be a high angle shot of the man looking vulnerable and helpless. In this way the director calls attention to an object or person to achieve a particular purpose.

Neutral: The far majority of shots are neutral, where no particular point of view is discernible. Eye-level shots, medium shots, and even lighting mark these shots. *

In film, point of view can shift quickly. We might begin looking at a scene of empty fields as a disinterested observer. The camera might then show us a little girl standing in this field, and through the use of an eye-line match (a shot of a person, followed by a shot of something he or she is looking at, followed by a shot of his or her reaction), we can see that she sees a venomous snake. We then see the reaction of the child as the snake comes closer and she cries out. Suddenly, the film will cut to a shot of her father as he hears her cry out and comes running. In those few frames we have seen from three points of view: omniscient observer, little girl, and father.

Consider a key scene early in *Mansfield Park* where the main characters first meet one another. It is solely through the use of the eye-line match that this scene sets up tensions that will be played out for the rest of the film. In it, the worldly London siblings, Mary and Henry Crawford, first meet Fanny and the Bertram siblings at their country home. As polite parlor conversation swirls around the group, we see the upright Edmund, who is to be a clergyman, notice Mary Crawford’s shapely leg—and then we see Fanny, his cousin who has been in love with Edmund all her life, notice him notice it. We then see Henry Crawford look flirtatiously at Maria, Edmund’s older, betrothed sister, who is sitting demurely next to her fiancé. The

* Adapted from *Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom* by John Golden, copyright 2001 by the National Council of Teachers of English. (www.ncte.org) Reprinted with permission.

camera next cuts to Maria, looking brazenly back—and Henry returning her glance. Next the camera rests on Julia, Maria’s eligible sister who might have expected Henry’s interest for herself, as she intercepts the looks between the two. A few minutes later, as the Bertram siblings’ mother prattles on about Maria’s upcoming wedding, we see Maria and Henry exchange another significant look, but this time the camera shows Maria’s fiancé noticing it. In a classroom, this scene could be slowed down and discussed both when it first appears and again at the end of the film when all the conflicts revealed here have been played out.

Because the illusion of reality is so strong in movies, filmmakers have invented techniques to inform viewers when the point of view changes. Besides the eye-line match, there are techniques such as the voice-over, the flashback, slow motion, distorting lenses, and even special sound effects to tell us we are in a character’s imagination, not reality. In *Northanger Abbey*, the camera circles, the images blur, and the music begins to pound when we enter Catherine’s fantasies. In *Wuthering Heights*, we depend on camerawork to let us know that Heathcliff has lost his mind: When he looks into Cathy’s grave, an eye-line match lets us know he sees the skeleton inside as the still-alive young woman he once loved.

An interesting example of the power of point of view can be seen in the 2008 film version of Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*. The entire film focuses on Anne Elliot, and we see all the characters and events from her point of view. Anne was forced by her family to give up the man she loved eight years earlier, and the palpable sense of her loneliness and loss pervades the entire film. If you were to count the shots of her alone, and specifically of her face in close-up, they would no doubt make up much of the film—a subtlety that works on viewers as they watch, but of which they may not consciously be aware. Any fan of Jane Austen will be able to guess, however, how the film ends: If most of the shots show Anne alone, what do you predict the final shot will feature?



ANNE ELLIOT (SALLY HAWKINS)

Courtesy BBC.

ACTIVITIES

Use these activities to experiment with the use of point of view.

1. Choose a key scene in a film and identify the point, or points, of view from which the action is shown. From what other point of view could this scene be told? How could the director or screenwriter make sure the viewer sees this different point of view? Storyboard, film, or write a script to depict this.
2. Experiment with point of view after you have viewed the film version of a literary work you have not read. Choose any character, and write a diary entry as if you were that person in the film. Read it aloud and have your classmates guess who is writing and at what point in the story.
3. In literature, a narrator can give the reader information about what a character is really thinking, even if that character is silent or is saying something entirely different. In a film, the actors must usually make these emotions clear to the viewer without the help of any “asides.” You might team up with a drama class to take a critical scene from a work of literature in which the author uses narration to explain how a character feels and try to make these feelings clear solely through acting. Have a partner watch and tell you what the character seemed to be thinking.

Tone & Mood

From the first scene in *The Turn of the Screw*, the filmmakers manage to imply that there is something insidious just below the sunny surface of the action. Critics have long found Henry James's novella ambiguous. (Are there really ghosts in the house, or is the governess mad?) The director of this film played with both of these notions by shooting many of the scenes so that the camera seems to watch this governess in a way that could imply either possibility. Throughout, with a combination of eerie lighting, music, and camera angles, the director creates a mood that leaves the viewer unsettled and frightened.

However, directors also use their tools to bring comic relief. The Dickens films, like the Dickens novels, provide myriad examples of this. At one of the lowest moments in *David Copperfield*, as David toils in the blacking factory, we hear the horrible sounds of other children working and moaning in the background. But then the music changes and the light brightens, and we get our first glimpse of Mr. Micawber, who will become David's great friend. In stories like this, where tragedy and comedy constantly play off each other, all the elements of filmmaking must work together to manipulate the viewer's emotions.



DAVID COPPERFIELD (DANIEL RADCLIFFE) AND MR. MICAWBER (BOB HOSKINS)

ACTIVITIES

Analyze how mood and tone are created in film with these activities.

1. How are different moods created in film? How does a director make us feel suspense? Sympathy and pathos? Choose a strong emotion that you experience while reading or viewing a story and list all the ways you can find through which the emotion is created. Now watch or read a version of this same story in another medium. How is this same emotion elicited in this medium?
2. Choose a scene or chapter from the novel and create a soundtrack of songs or music that would enhance the mood of that section. What do you think, for instance, of the choice of Coldplay's song "Trouble" as background for this [montage](#) of four MASTERPIECE Dickens adaptations? How would a different music choice change the information you get from this trailer?
3. The use of dramatic music in *Northanger Abbey* is so important to the mood of the film that the entire meaning might change if it were replaced with something upbeat and light. Suggest a scene in a film you are viewing in which the music is very important, then suggest how the scene could be entirely reinterpreted if a different kind of music were playing.
4. Filmmakers use color and lighting very deliberately to enhance mood or to be symbolic. What particular uses of color (or lack of color) do you remember from the film you are watching? How did it affect you? What "message" do specific colors seem to carry? How, for instance, does the contrast between the gray palette of *Oliver Twist*'s workhouse life and the color-rich scenes in Fagin's lair work to bring to life what Tom Hardy, the actor who plays Bill Sikes, describes in an interview on the DVD as "*Taxi Driver* mixed with Disney...Silly, then violent, then silly"? 

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