

OVERVIEW

Background Information

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Introduction

Teaching Trailers Primary uses a selection of trailers linked to activities to help pupils understand how the film industry uses the trailer to persuade audiences to come to the cinema to see their film. A trailer is a taster of the film in its entirety, and as such, can also be an extremely useful teaching tool for narrative and genre. Its short duration and strong visual content means that it can be used successfully with pupils of all ages and abilities in one sitting.

For use with pupils between ages 5-11, these questions can help develop the following skills:

- speaking
- engaging and responding to texts
- listening and responding
- deducing, inferring and interpreting information
- group discussion and interaction
- evaluating the purpose of a text
- understanding and interpreting texts

Why do film companies need to use trailers?

When a film is released at the cinema it has only a short space of time in which to become a 'box-office hit'. The marketing campaign plays a vital role in advertising the film to the potential audience and in encouraging them to come to the cinema to see it. The companies who own the film and loan it to the cinema to show for a period of time are called the distributors, because they distribute the film around the country.

Given the rapid developments in technology and audience choice, being a cinema 'box-office hit' is not necessarily the only measure of success as different films, with different audiences in mind and different production and release budgets, may not look like a 'smash hit' but can still do very well on their own terms – across subsequent platforms as well as in cinemas.

The distributors are keen for the film to be as successful as possible so they create a marketing campaign that aims to raise awareness of the film and arouse interest. The major elements of a film marketing campaign are posters, trailers, radio adverts and TV spots.

- Where would you expect to see each of these?
- What makes you want to go and see a film? How do you decide which films to see?

Why is the trailer important?

The trailer is a powerful tool in the marketing campaign with different versions often produced for different purposes, particularly as they make very 'shareable' content on social networks. Posters are also important in capturing the initial interest of the audience and drawing them into the cinema, but they cannot convey the excitement and atmosphere of film in the same way as a trailer does. The combination of moving images and sound, both experienced 'larger than life' through the advanced equipment of the cinema auditorium, is an exciting experience.

- Look at the title of each trailer on the contents list. What clues does it give you as to what the film will be about?
- Freeze a frame where you can see the title of the film. How does the font used give you clues as to what it will be about?
- Which is more important in a trailer – the sound or the images?

What types of trailer are there?

A distribution company may decide to release more than one trailer for a film, particularly if it is a blockbuster with a large marketing budget. The first type of trailer that is used to promote a film is usually the 'teaser trailer'. As the name suggests, the teaser trailer is designed to 'tease' the audience and whet their appetite for more information. The idea is that people will talk about the film to their friends. The teaser trailer will be followed by a main trailer, which usually plays in cinemas three to four weeks before the film is due to be released. Trailers may also be used in TV advertising campaigns, but as airtime is expensive, these will be very short cuts of the trailer, designed for impact in as short a space of time as possible.

- Choose one of the longer trailers and discuss how you would cut it down to create a good 'teaser' trailer.

When is the trailer made?

Most trailers are created and produced at the same time as the film is being edited. Many of the films we see are from America and the trailers have been created there, hence the use of American vocabulary and accent in the voiceover.

- Even though the film will have different release dates in different countries, the same trailer will probably be used. How does the information on the trailer 'get around' this?

How are trailers chosen to preview before certain films?

An enjoyable part of the whole cinema experience is watching the trailers which preview the main feature. The exhibitor (cinema manager) uses their marketing knowledge to select trailers aimed at a similar target audience to that of the main film, in the hope that the forthcoming attractions will appeal to them and bring them back at a later date. When they return, the process is repeated and in this way a regular audience is established.

Classification is also an important factor in what is shown. Trailers are given a classification in the same way that films are and an adult trailer cannot play before a film aimed at a family audience. However, sometimes trailers for adult films are cut to make them suitable for a younger audience with the idea that accompanying adults will return to see the film on their own.

The films trailed are all due to be released in the UK over the next few months or year. From what you have seen, why do you think the distributor has chosen their specific time of release?

What classification do you think each of the films here are? Explain your choices. For more information on film classification, visit <http://www.cbbfc.co.uk> (The Children's British Board of Classification).

- Describe what the 'cinema experience' means to you. How could it be better?

Why is it important for a trailer to show us the genre of the film and how does this happen?

A trailer aims to give the audience information about the film - what the story is about, who the stars are and what genre or type of film it will be. Genre is important in film marketing because our decision about what to see will partly depend upon whether we enjoyed other similar films. When we view a trailer we are automatically 'decoding' the things we see and hear to work out what genre the film is. For instance, if we see daring, brave figures and hear dramatic music we recognise that this will be a film of the adventure genre. Animated images and bright colours will usually indicate a family film, a rapid beat to the music means suspense, and so on. We call these recognisable sounds and images 'conventions' of the genre. Occasionally, a film will be a cross of more than one genre and then it may take more time for us to decide what it is. This can add to our enjoyment, as our expectations are taken first in one direction, then in another.

Another indication as to the genre of a film is the stars. As a cinema audience we are used to associating certain stars with certain genres, for example Mike Myers with comedy. A trailer will always ensure that we are made aware of who the stars are, as this will encourage the audience to see the film and help them recognise the genre. Watch the trailers on this resource through once. For each film, try to identify:

- the genre
- the target audience (e.g. young / old / male / female)

Try to say on what exactly you are basing your answers. Compare your answers with the rest of the class.

How does the trailer show that this film is worth coming to see?

Whilst the marketing campaign uses genre to gain our interest it must also show us how this new film is different to others in the same genre category. The trailer must make clear the Unique Selling Point or USP of each film. The USP might be linked to the genre in that it is an unusual mix – say a fairy tale, or starring an actor who usually plays a different type of role or it might be something distinct like the use of special effects.

- What do you think is the USP of each of the films on this resource?

What are the features of a trailer?

Trailers are not 'mini-films'. They are a genre in their own right and have their own set of easily recognisable features or conventions. Trailers are designed to capture our attention and hold it for a short space of time. They give us just enough information to raise our curiosity but not enough to spoil the story of the film. They create a mood or atmosphere and heighten our anticipation of what is to come. In short, they tease but they don't tell.

In some ways watching a trailer is like doing a jigsaw puzzle – we're given some information as to plot and character and our task is to fill in the missing pieces in the time available. The style in which the information is conveyed is fast moving and requires our attention one hundred per cent of the time. To watch a film at this pace would be impossible – we could not cope with the input and would 'switch off'. However, we enjoy the rollercoaster effect of a trailer.

The sound is very important in a trailer, particularly the music, which helps to create an atmosphere. The voiceover, a feature of advertising, is used to summarise the story and emphasise credit information (such as star or director names) where appropriate. Like every other element of the trailer, the voiceover also looks to promote the film by building our anticipation.

Here are some of the more common conventions of the trailers:

1. They highlight the 'best bits' of the film; the very funny, the very sad, the action-packed, the bizarre, etc.
2. We are not shown the story in the correct narrative order
3. They showcase the stars of the film
4. Some visual images stay on screen for only just enough time for our mind to realise what we are seeing
5. Conversations between characters usually consist of one line each
6. Unusual angles are often used to show events or characters
7. Action is interspersed with credits on screen
8. Voiceovers are used to tell the story and give credit information
9. Music plays an important role in creating atmosphere
10. The title does not appear until the end
11. The trailer builds to a climax, where it ends

Try watching two or three of the trailers without the visual images (i.e. close your eyes!)

- What mood does the music create?
- We are all familiar with the traditional voiceover (man's voice) used on trailers. What effect does this have and why do you think the voice was chosen?

The children in your class could create trailers of their own. Start with storyboarding what will appear in each shot and write the soundtrack underneath. Use the list of conventions on page 7 to write a commentary, explaining the choices you have made. If you are using a voiceover in your trailer, you may wish to look at the section on voiceover on the next page before starting.

The voiceover

The voiceover (including words on screen) is one of the most frequently used conventions of the trailer genre. It is used for several reasons:

1. It helps us make sense of the narrative by giving us background such as where the action is set
2. It showcases the stars appearing in the film
3. It can give us information about the important filmmakers behind the film such as the director and producer and their previous work
4. It helps to build a sense of anticipation about the film's release
5. It reinforces the title of the film
6. It sets the tone for the film

Read through the voiceover scripts and then view the trailer again with the script in front of you. Which of the above functions do the words fulfill and how do they do so? It may help you to consider the following, particularly when looking at how tone is set and how anticipation is built:

- Think about how the choice of words reflects the tone of the film
- Think about the length of the words used
- What words and phrases are designed to 'excite'?
- What repetition can you see within the words and sentence structure?
- What effect does this have on our expectations?
- Think about the length of each line
- Where does the emphasis fall in the spoken text? (It may help to listen to the voiceover without looking at the images.)
- Think about the accent and delivery of the voice used

A voiceover can summarise the story between 5-8 lines. It does not give away the ending, but helps us anticipate what is to come. Choose a story you know well and do the same. Some trailers rely on words on screen and characters' dialogue rather than a voiceover. Music also plays an important part alongside these features of a trailer.