

PICTURACY® – FILM NARRATIVE AND THE PRIMARY FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

Film is embedded in the new Primary Framework for Literacy where emphasis is placed on visual literacy and on-screen texts. Film Education's Picturacy® series takes the 'word, sentence' text' approach to literacy further by exploring the relationship between shot, sequence and text on film.

In this workshop, useful for Primary sector professionals and those who are interested in progression models for visual literacy work, key film language concepts such as sound, light, colour and editing were explored showing how film can help children develop a greater understanding of narrative structure and representation of character- all this leading to raised standards in reading and writing.

The Picturacy® resource functionality enables teachers to incorporate the key film language concepts into their personalised learning plans. Delegates will work on laptops to interactively analyse film extracts, create their own sound effects and still photography.

BACKGROUND

The use of film within literacy is embedded in the governmental guidance for primary teachers. The Primary Framework suggests using film to deepen pupils' understanding of narrative and storytelling, which is the intention of Picturacy®.

A grasp of film language helps children obtain a deeper understanding of genre, narrative, character and audience. It has also been shown to raise standards in reading and writing as it allows children to compare composition and effect in writing and film. Authors and filmmakers have different tools at their disposal in the way they tell stories. Writers rely on descriptive and figurative language (and sometimes illustrations) to create settings and characters whilst filmmakers use set design, actors, costume and make-up etc. Mood and pace in film is created by the use of the camera, light and colour, sound and music. A writer chooses language carefully and varies sentence structure. The passing of time in a book is established by time connectives and paragraphs whilst in a film this is achieved through editing and the sequencing of shots and scenes.

Picturacy® is about actively reading film. Whilst film can improve the reading and enjoyment of all texts, reading film is a skill in itself. It empowers children to discern and evaluate the on-screen media they absorb each day. Reading film also develops children's understanding of filmmaking techniques so they can develop skills as filmmakers and go on to express themselves in an area of creativity that is rapidly developing in primary schools.

There are six interactive 'functions', which allow teachers and learners to work with and manipulate film clips:

- **Bubbles** – add text with speech, thoughts and feelings bubbles
- **Colour** – add colour filters and adjust the light to alter mood in clips and stills
- **Storyboard** – sequence images to be played back and print as a writing frame
- **Camera** – connect a camera and explore shot types and camera angles
- **Sound** – separate different layers of sound; dialogue; sound effects and music
- **Recording** – this brand new tool allows children to record their own dialogue, music and sound effects, and then edit a soundtrack to play alongside film clips

PERSONALISED LEARNING

Film is a method of communication that inspires and develops a range of abilities in children. Critical and creative film work is attractive to the three main different learning styles: kinetic (through hands-on camera work); visual (through the immediate synthesis of the moving image) and aural (through the rich multi-layered use of dialogue, music and sound in film). The use of film in the classroom is undoubtedly a motivational tool that can develop the whole child – not just one or two skills.

ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING AND ASSESSING PUPIL PROGRESS

Filmmaking projects provide valid assessment opportunities, which allow teachers to focus on ‘how’ children are learning as well as ‘what’ they are learning.

Using the Picturacy® resource in class gives opportunities for assessment by revisiting a genre in literacy through film work. For example, teachers could engage children in a discussion/written piece of work having watched a carefully chosen clip to assess their understanding of one or more of the following Primary Framework strands and Assessment focuses:

- Strand 9; dealing with aspects of composition and effects (moods, pace, viewpoint, underlying themes of a story)
- Strand 10; dealing with aspects of structure and organisation (building tension, character development, setting and sense of place)
- Strand 11; dealing with aspects of sentence work and punctuation (figurative and expressive language)

Using the resource as a stimulus can provide firm evidence of independence and consistency in pupil attainment without the teacher scaffolding the given assessment focus points.

The Picturacy® resource allows for comparison of composition and effect in film and writing – which in turn leads to a deeper understanding of genre, narrative, character and audience.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

As a starting point to develop film language skills, delegates were asked to examine how film and writing compare in the following contexts:

- Character
- Setting
- Mood
- Pace
- Viewpoint
- Passing of time/flashbacks

It was soon established that filmmakers have many different tools at their disposal with which they can translate descriptive and figurative language to the big screen. For instance: in the creation of mood in a novel, writers would use descriptive and figurative language whereas a filmmaker would use light; colour; music; sound; camera angles and movement. To demonstrate a change in pace within a story, writers would use sentence length/structure; paragraphs; chapters and vocabulary, whereas a filmmaker can use music; sound; editing; transitions; length of shots; sequence of scenes.

This workshop aimed to give delegates a better understanding of how these filmmaking tools can be used effectively, and how they can deliver these skills to their pupils – not only to enable them as film creators, but to enrich their story writing skills.

CAMERA

In order to demonstrate how visual, 'filmic' thinking can positively impact written work, we took some time examining how important camera angle and movement is in terms of story creation on screen.

Asking 'how are the effects of these shot types achieved in writing?' we looked at the key shot types used in filmmaking (close-up; mid shot; long shot; high angle; low angle; tracking shot; panning shot; point-of-view shot and aerial shot). We then looked at individual shots from different films and strived to describe them in one sentence. We found that the language we used to describe the film stills was much richer – a direct result of thinking visually.

TASK

Delegates were challenged to tell their own version of a film extract using screen 'grabs'.

Using the 'screen grab' function on the Picturacy® resource, delegates had to choose 12 key images from the clip 'The first time I had ever seen a fox so close' (The Fox and the Child, Jacquet, 2007). It proved hard to choose 12 'key' shots from so many. This illustrated the complexity of story development on film – each shot is chosen for a reason. The director and editor will have thought hard about the juxtaposition of shots within any given sequence.

Once they had chosen their 12 shots, they had to sequence their 'grabs' into a storyboard. They were then asked to annotate each shot with the 'thinking, feeling, saying' notes available as part of the Picturacy® functionality. Again, this helped to get delegates to think visually when describing feelings and emotions and it showed the complexity of the filmmaking process.

The aim of constructing storyboards in this way was to challenge delegates to:

- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the different shot types and their effect.
- Establish character visually and by using speech and thought bubbles
- Use text boxes to add a sentence to each frame using time connectives, powerful verbs and adverbs

BEYOND CP3 2009

The aim of my workshop was to demonstrate the value of the critical appreciation of film in the classroom and how it can directly improve written work. The Picturacy® resource aims to take teachers and learners beyond the technology of the 'edit suite' to ensure that real learning opportunities about narrative construction on screen can occur. The easy to use tools allow pupils to creatively evaluate a wide range of film clips and also to create their own multimedia texts. Whilst this was a 'critical' CP3 session, a great deal of creativity took place, and I look forward to working with each delegate in the future to see how they use the resource beyond CP3 and in the classroom.

Julie Green is an Educational Consultant for Film Education and a practicing primary schoolteacher. She has written on film and moving image education, specialising in developing visual literacy resources in the primary sector.

Having spent many years as Director of Education at Film Education, Julie took time out to raise her young family, and she now divides her time between her teaching job in Henley-on-Thames and her post as advisor at Film Education.

Julie is responsible for developing Film Education's Primary Picturacy® series, that focuses on film and moving image work on an interactive whiteboard platform.