

READING AND EDITING FILM TRAILERS

Julie Green

ABSTRACT

The Primary Framework for Literacy recommends the analysis of film trailers as persuasive texts. In a short space of time, a trailer can establish genre, mood and atmosphere and give suggestion of character, plot and key themes.

Film trailers are ideal moving image texts for primary literacy, as they can be watched in one sitting and read as a whole. The power of editing, sound and language combine in a trailer to excite and influence audiences. Trailers are narrative constructs as well as persuasive texts.

During this workshop, after an introduction on moving image analysis, delegates edited their own film trailers with transitions, voiceover, music and sound. The workshop was aimed at those who work in the upper primary sector, or who are responsible for the transition stage between primary and secondary. A group of secondary practitioners attended the workshop and found it useful.

AIMS

This workshop aimed to move delegates on from the critical approach to the moving image to the creation of moving image texts. We used the film trailer as the central theme as it has much potential for direct application to classroom film work as a persuasive text.

The workshop was aimed at primary and secondary practitioners who are interested in using film trailers to teach persuasive texts. Primary teachers, in particular, found the session useful as it directly addressed the renewed Primary Framework for Literacy's non-fiction unit on persuasive texts:

'Watch a trailer for a popular children's film. Discuss the purpose of the text and the emotions it is intended to provoke in readers. Discuss how the soundtrack, sound effects, voiceover and moving images were used to persuade children to go and see the film. Plan a trailer to promote a film using key moments from the film. Prepare a written voiceover script to persuade a reader to see a film. Demonstrate how to combine words, music and images to convince the reader.'

(nationalstrategies.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/primary/primaryframework/literacy/planning/Year4/Nonfiction/unit4)

The learning outcomes of the activities demonstrated in this workshop can be used in a cross-curricular and cross age-range context:

- to improve range and choice of persuasive vocabulary
- to generate ideas and a creative visual response to a text
- to create audience sensitive and effective persuasive texts
- to provide a model and scaffold for aspects of non-fiction persuasive text writing
- Speaking and Listening skills
- Drama
- SEAL (social skills, teamwork)
- Design and Technology (props, costumes, special effects etc.)
- ICT (editing, sound creation)

Trailer analysis and creation are also effective tools to use in Assessment for Learning. Pupils can demonstrate a whole range of skills without the teacher having to scaffold the learning techniques. The use of trailers in the classroom enhances the 'stepping stones' approach highlighted in the Rose Report.

Overall, my main aim was to demonstrate how trailers can be effectively used to help pupils gain a deeper understanding of setting, plot, character, music, dialogue, shot sequencing and articulation of meaning in a persuasive text context.

INTRODUCTION

We started the session by watching and responding to current film trailers, specifically *Where the Wild Things Are*, directed by Spike Jonze and *Up*, directed by Pete Docter. Both of these trailers are featured on Film Education's Teaching Trailers: Primary digital resource.

We watched each trailer and then broke each one down into the following stages:

1. OPENING – establishes setting and introduces character
2. BUILD UP – relationships established. Characters seen in their 'worlds'
3. PROBLEM – a dilemma or series of complications. Characters are forced with a problem to overcome
4. CLIMAX – the trailer ends as the title of the film is announced

ANALYSING A TRAILER

We discussed each trailer in the following terms:

- Genre
- Narrative structure
- Unique Selling Point (USP – what makes a particular film unique and 'sellable')
- Target audience
- Music
- Shot types/camera angles
- Choice/juxtaposition of shots
- Transitions between shots
- Length of shots at beginning and end
- Key characters/character development
- Pace
- Dialogue
- Voiceover
- Special effects
- Credits and intertitles

It was soon established that an effective trailer is one that introduced the story and key characters in an exciting and engaging way whilst at the same time persuading different types of audiences to go and see the film at the cinema.

THE FEATURES OF A TRAILER CAMPAIGN

Having discussed individual trailers, we went on to talk about trailer 'conventions'.

Trailers are designed to capture our attention and to make us want to find out more about a particular film title. They create a mood and atmosphere to heighten our anticipation of what is to come.

Through voiceover analysis, we determined how the words used (e.g. 'From the people who brought you...') demonstrate genre or key themes ('a new kind of fear'). We examined more trailer conventions:

- They highlight the most exciting, funny, scary or 'best' bits of the film
- We are not shown the story in the correct narrative order
- They showcase the stars of the film
- Some visual images stay on screen just long enough for us to realise what we are seeing
- Conversations between characters often consist of one line each
- Action is interspersed with credits/tag lines
- Voiceovers are often used to tell the story and give credit information
- Music plays an important role in creating atmosphere, as do moments of silence
- The title usually doesn't appear until the very end
- The trailer builds to a climax, where it ends

ACTIVITIES

During the two-hour session, delegates were asked to consider how narrative is established in a film trailer and to explore effective editing techniques in trailer creation. Each delegate was given a copy of Film Education's latest Teaching Trailers digital resources (primary and secondary). In preparation for the hands-on filming and editing session, I modelled the basic functions of the 'Make a Trailer' section of the Teaching Trailers resources and delegates worked in pairs to re-edit the *Up* trailer.

After some analysis work, delegates were given cameras which they used to film key shots for a trailer based on a given pitch, synopsis and storyboard (based on an article featured in the Guardian, May 31st 2008 'Woman Found Living in Closet': www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/may/31/japan). Once they had spent 45 minutes filming, they then had to work in twos or threes to edit their trailer, add text, music, voiceover and sound effects.

Delegates combined their understanding of film marketing with the key concepts behind creating a persuasive text to create their own film trailer based on the newspaper extract. The guidelines were as follows:

1. Sequence the storyboard
2. Film each shot (establishing shots no longer than 5 seconds, others between 1 and 3 seconds)
3. Import shots into iMovie
4. Trim and sequence the shots
5. Write and add voiceover
6. Add transitions, music and sound effects
7. Keep trailer under 2 minutes.
8. Export trailer as a QuickTime file at CD-ROM quality

Each group successfully managed to create a trailer in the given time, but not all found the time to write and add a voiceover.

BEYOND CP3 2009

As a result of taking part in my workshop, I hope that delegates see the potential of watching and discussing many different types of trailers in class.

Following on from some solid critical analysis and trailer deconstruction work, I hope that delegates will now have the skills and confidence to work with their students to create some trailers of their own, using existing trailers (like those featured on the Teaching Trailers resources) or using given 'genre specific' film pitches. The planning that goes into creating a trailer provides many opportunities for some rich creative written work: storyboarding; shot listing; voiceover scripting; short story to accompany trailer; 'director's commentary'; novel extract adaptation into a film pitch and then trailer. The creative possibilities are many.

Julie Green is an Educational Consultant for Film Education and a practicing primary schoolteacher. She has written widely 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 on an Interactive Whiteboard platform.