

STAR TREK GENERATIONS



Let us suppose that you have been given the following idea to start writing a story:

"A man has discovered something which he keeps secret. Other people think that he is dangerous and try to find out what this secret is."

Now, before you even attempt to write the story, what decisions do you have to make? What question would you have to answer before you start writing?

To give you a clue, use the following to start some of your questions:

- How?
- When?
- Where?
- Who?
- What?
- Why?

When you have written down your questions, you should then try to answer them. This will give you a basis for the story.

Group Task:

Once you have decided on the answers to your questions and an outline to start your story, compare both your questions and your answers with those of other people in the class. What questions did they come up with? How did they answer these questions? What sort of outlines have they created?

You will have seen from the previous exercise that a variety of types of stories could spring from the quote that you were given.

Make a list of the types of stories that people came up with,

Let us look at the outline again, but this time start from the point of view of types of stories. Below are a number of different types of story. We have broken down the various parts of the outline - the secret, the main character, the threat. What you have to do in each section of the chart below is to think of the possibilities for each of these parts of the story. So, for science fiction, what could the possible secret be? Who or what could the main character be?

Do this for all of the types of story listed.

	The main character	The secret	The threat
Romance			
Science fiction			
Western			
Spy story			
Crime story			

When you have completed this, try to shift your ideas from one type of story to another. Do they still work?

Finally, if we said that we wanted you to develop the outline of the story so that it could be made into a 'Star Trek' film, how would you go about it? What would the secret be? What could the threat be?

Look at the images below. How would you fit these characters into your story line? What roles do you think they would play? Why do you think this?



TYPES OF FILM

Referring to films by type is a form of shorthand. It is useful to us when we want to explain something to a friend and it is also useful to the people who make films because it allows them to let us know what the film is about. It also helps us, as you will have seen, when we want to create a story - we have certain ideas that we can use to create a certain type of story.

Instead of using the word 'type', however, we are going to use the word 'genre' - a French word which means 'type' or 'sort' and which both film critics and filmmakers usually use.

Task:

Write down as many genres of films as you can think of. You will already have met some in the previous exercises. Now think carefully about the films that you have seen recently. Do they fit into your list of genres. If not, how would you describe them? You might come to the conclusion that some are a mixture of genres.

When we pay to see any of these types of films we have certain expectations of them. Part of our pleasure in watching certain types of film is that we enjoy predicting what will happen and having these expectations fulfilled.

Genre is a term which groups films (and other media products such as television programmes, comics, radio programmes) together by way of their similarities. Each genre consists of a range of elements which allow us to recognise it and to expect certain things to occur within it. These elements are commonly called

Task

To illustrate this, look at the two stills below.

Firstly write down everything that you can see in each still. What clues are you given as to which film genre the still has come from? Can you group the clues together under various headings?



You should have noticed as you worked on the exercise above, that there are elements in films which are usually recognisable and fairly constant within the various genres. However, it might interest you to know that the two stills came from the same film. Look back again at what you said about the different genres of the stills. Looking at what you wrote, what would you say about the film from which the stills were taken?

You were looking for certain conventions within each still but sometimes our expectations can be confused.

CONVENTIONS

If you look back to the chart you completed earlier you will see that you have already started to come up with some narrative conventions for a number of genres. In certain types of films we would expect to see certain things, for example certain types of costumes, settings, characters. These all help us to understand what is happening. The conventions allow us to think back to other films that we have seen and to instantly understand what is happening, what sort of character a particular person is and to try to predict what will happen next.

SCIENCE FICTION AND 'STAR TREK'

The two stills that you have studied are both taken from the 'Star Trek' film - 'Star Trek: Generations'.

The 'Star Trek' films and television series have been popular now for over twenty years. In many ways they are a sub-genre - they use many conventions of the science fiction film but have by now also created their own conventions. Before looking in detail at 'Star Trek: Generations', you should note down the conventions that you would expect to find in a science fiction film under the following headings:

- Typical stories
- Typical situations in stories
- Typical characters
- Typical period setting
- Typical gestures
- Typical décor
- Typical dress
- Typical objects
- Typical themes

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCIENCE FICTION

100 years ago this year, the first ever public screening of a film took place in Paris. Most of the early films made were what we would now call documentaries, but in 1902 a Frenchman named Georges Melies showed his 'Voyage to the Moon', a film that may be termed the first ever science fiction film. Nowadays with the advent of superior, and incredibly expensive, special effects the SF film is a firmly established genre.

Why do you think that the science fiction genre has always been popular with audiences?

Task

Make a list of all the films you have seen that you consider to be science fiction, and also attempt to date each one approximately (late 40's, early 70's is sufficient). Then, write them down in chronological order.

Now compare your list with that of someone else in the group. How many films do you have in common? How many are different? Can you make a case for each film belonging to this genre? Pick some of the films that appear only on your list and justify their position there.

DEVELOPING GENRES

Shortly after Melies' film another new cinematic genre started developing with the release of Edwin Porter's 'The Great Train Robbery', what has now been called the first 'western' film. The two genres have, over the years, rivalled each other for popularity.

For many years the western was the staple diet of film-goers, TV watchers and novel readers. By the mid-sixties the popularity of the western was declining. In fact, by the early seventies the western was considered box-office poison. People were losing money! So, what happened? The science fiction film started to rise in popularity. But how different were these two genres?

Task

Under the appropriate column write down as many conventions and expectations as you can. You will probably find it useful to look back at some of the charts that you completed earlier on in this guide.

The western genre	The science fiction genre

Study your results carefully, perhaps with a partner, and then create a new chart. What similarities can you see? What are the differences? Use the chart below to show your conclusions.

Similarities	Differences

Which column contains the most information?

What conclusions can we draw from this evidence?

What we are tackling here is a new idea - the fact that in many cases it is not that a genre actually dies out it is just dressed up differently. The ingredients are the same, the end result can look very different.

'STAR TREK: GENERATIONS' AND GENRE

We have already described 'Star Trek: Generations' as a science fiction film. Look back at the conventions you expected to see in a science fiction film. Do you expect to see all of these in a 'Star Trek' film? Are there other conventions which you only associate with 'Star Trek'?

When you have seen 'Star Trek: Generations', tick off all of the conventions that appeared in the film, both from science fiction in general and also from what we have called the 'Star Trek' conventions.

You could also think about what did appear in the film which you were not expecting.

Task

As recent science fiction developed out of the western, think about how you would rewrite 'Star Trek: Generations' as a western film.

Task

Are there other genres that could effectively cross over into science fiction? Or could science fiction stories be transferred to other genres? Briefly write down the story of 'Star Trek: Generations'. Then choose any other genre that you wish and attempt to retell this story within the conventions of the chosen genre.

CHARACTERS AND GENRE

One of the things that you will have seen in your work so far is that certain genres require certain types of characters. Below are a number of the main characters from 'Star Trek: Generations'. If you have seen 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' on television you may already be aware of the character type to which each corresponds.

Next to each image of the character, write down a short description of the character - either from your own knowledge or by discussing the characters with someone in your group who has seen the television series.

Now, think of other science fiction films that you have seen. Are there similar character types in these to those that appear in 'Star Trek: Generations'? In the third column of the chart, write down the names of the characters and the film in which they appear.

Character	Description	Similar character/ film they appear in
Captain James T. Kirk		
Captain Jean-Luc Picard		
Commander William Riker		
Lieutenant Commander Geordi La Forge		
Lieutenant Commander Data (android)		
Dr. Beverly Crusher		
Counselor Deanna Troi		
Montgomery Scott		
Commander Pavel Chekov		
Lieutenant Commander Worf		

STAR TREK GENERATIONS' AND FILM REALISM

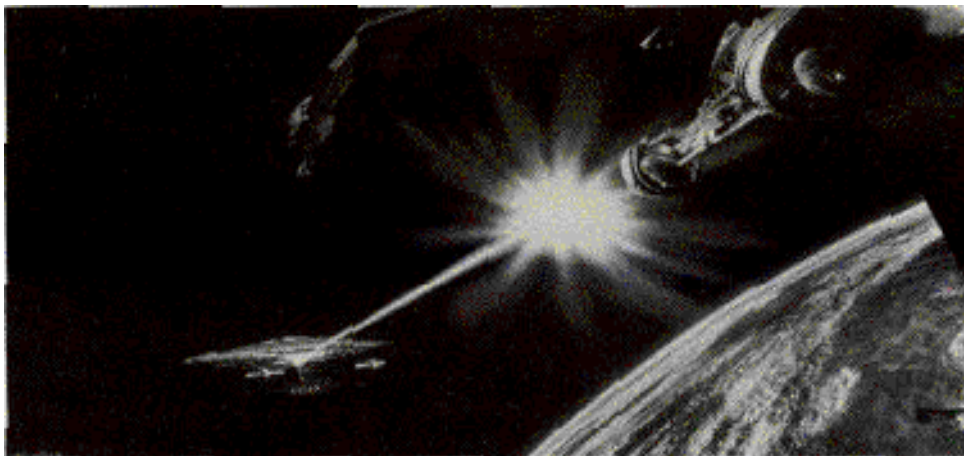
When we talk about a film we often say that it is realistic. But what do we mean by this?

In science fiction films we often hear people saying such things as:

"If we warp to match factor 26 then we have a chance of reversing the negativity and putting the ship in overdrive back in time and thus escaping the force field which surrounds us."

If someone said this to you on the bus going to school or college, you would think that there was something wrong with them. And yet we quite happily listen to lines like these in a science fiction film and accept them.

And we might still say that a film such as 'Star Trek: Generations' was realistic. So what do we mean by realistic? Do we mean that what we see on the screen is the same as real life, or do we mean something else?



Task:

Look at the statements below. Which ones do you agree with and which do you disagree with?

1. Films show things just as they are in real life.
2. Films show things as we expect to see them shown in films.
3. Films mirror the real world.
4. Films are stories which look as if they are happening in the real world.
5. Films reflect what we would like the world to be like.
6. Films reflect what filmmakers would like the world to be like.
7. We do not take films seriously. We know that they are just stories.

When we watch a film, we lose ourselves in the narrative, get involved with the characters.

It is all too easy to believe that a film just happens, that what we see on the screen naturally runs its course, that events just fall into place. You will have seen from your work on genre and 'Star Trek: Generations' that you have all sorts of expectations of the film. But do these expectations come from other films or from real life?

- What really happens in a film?
- What makes it 'realistic'?
- What makes 'Star Trek: Generations' different from a documentary film about space travel?

Task:

Write down what aspects of 'Star Trek: Generations' make it 'realistic'. Does it have to do with the characters being believable? What else? When you have done this, look back at your answers to the questions on the conventions of genre. How many similarities are there between both sets of answers?

Jean-Luc Godard, a famous French filmmaker, once said that "cinema is not the reflection of reality, but the reality of that reflection".

This comment can be broken down into two parts:

- When we talk about films being 'realistic' then it is as if we are saying that they reflect reality (almost like a mirror).
- What Godard suggests is that what we see on a screen is, in fact, not a simple reflection. It is a changed representation of 'reality'. It has gone through the film making process which has in some way changed the 'reality' of what is shown. What we expect from a film is a certain way of showing things, showing them through the reality of film and not real life.

Thus we can expect science fiction films to present us with situations which we could never meet in life but are used to meeting in science fiction films. We can say that 'Star Trek: Generations' is realistic because we have come across similar situations in other 'Star Trek' films.

Think, for example, about how filmmakers can persuade us to think about things in a certain way by the way that they film their subjects.

Think how time in a film is shown.

- Are we shown events continuously, as in real life, or are events selected? Think about some of the moments in 'Star Trek: Generations' - for example when it says "75 years later". When you saw this appear on the screen, how did you react? Were you like us a little confused? What confused you?

Now consider the characters that we often see in films such as 'Star Trek: Generations'.

- How similar are people's lifestyles in films compared to what we experience every day? Even though the film is set in the distant future, in what ways are the worries and the pleasures of the characters in the film the same as ours?
- Are they as we might want to live, i.e. the way that films persuade us might be an exciting or different way to live?

Science fiction films such as 'Star Trek: Generations' can appear to be realistic, yet surely this is in terms of the way that they relate to other science fiction films and not to the 'reality' of science? It is in relation to the world of films that they appear realistic, not the 'real' world.

When we watch a film, how aware are we that we are watching something that has been created very carefully for us?

REPRESENTING SCIENCE

To state the obvious, science fiction films present us with stories set in the future where scientific development has led humans beyond our own experience - to different planets, to meet different life forms etc.

But is science always looked on as a positive thing? Does it always bring advantages to people?

Science is all around us in 'Star Trek: Generations'. Try to list what you think are the positive aspects of science that we are shown and what you think are the negative. Is it science which triumphs at the end of the film or is it human beings and their ingenuity which save the day? Why do you think that science fiction films end in this way, that science is not the final answer?

Think about the ending of 'Star Trek: Generations'. How does human ingenuity help to save the day? What place does science play in the ending of the film?

IMAGES OF SOCIETY

'Star Trek: Generations' presents us with a science fiction view of the world of the future. What is society like? What is the relationship between the Klingons and the Federation of Planets? Do we ever see anyone bad from the federation? What values do members of the Federation hold?

Think of moments from the film where we learn about the beliefs and values of the Federation. Then think about others which focus on characters such as the Klingons and Dr. Soran. What do they want? Which standpoint does the film show as preferable and why?

How are these ideas shown visually in the film? How do the representations of the characters and their

ECONOMICS OF GENRE

So far we have talked about genre as a critical term, a word which we can use when talking about films. It might well be useful to audiences, but it is also useful to the makers of films.

Since films cost so much to produce, they need to make a lot of money at the box office to cover investment and to make a profit. The financiers therefore look for some kind of guarantee that the film will attract a large enough audience to achieve this.

Because 'Star Trek' films have made money at the box office before, and because the television programmes are still popular and the merchandise and videos sell well, then the film producers feel that there is still a market for 'Star Trek' films. Thus we are now seeing 'Star Trek: Generations' on the screen.

Audiences are familiar with certain kinds of stories, with certain genres. They also enjoy particular genres whilst disliking others. If we are familiar with the conventions implicit in a particular text then this can work to the advantage of the filmmaker, for they can rely or even depend on the audience's knowledge and awareness.

The audience recognises the characters without needing to have things spelled out to them. They recognise situations at the start of the film, enabling them to anticipate what will happen in the rest of the film.

Task

How much did you know about 'Star Trek' before seeing 'Star Trek: Generations'? Do you think that this helped you to enjoy the film more than someone else in your group who may have known nothing about the films and television series?

In order to attract people who are willing to invest money, the producers of films have to come up with 'packages' which they hope will guarantee an audience so that they can persuade backers to put money into their project. If you think about 'Star Trek' there may be two different audiences - those who have seen the original 'Star Trek' films and television series and those who have only seen 'Star Trek: The Next Generation' on television. In what ways does this new 'Star Trek' film offer something for both audiences?

CREATING AUDIENCES

Because films need audiences in order to make a profit, it is important that potential audiences be aware that the film is about to open in the cinema. How do distribution companies do this? Before you carry out the next exercise, think about who the potential audience for 'Star Trek: Generations' might be.

Advertising

Central to the advertising campaign will be the main image that is used on the poster. Look carefully at the poster image for 'Star Trek: Generations'. What does it tell you about the film? What image of the story does it give?

Promotions

It is not only the film industry that advertises films. Nowadays companies manufacturing other products also use film as a method of attracting buyers to their products. On 'Star Trek: Generations', UIP, the distributor of the film, have tied in with a number of companies in order to create as much awareness of the film as possible.

Task

When the film is released, look in shops and supermarkets to see how many different hooks, toys, articles of clothing, magazines and even food packaging, features 'Star Trek: Generations'. What image of the film is given on the various merchandise? Are certain images used again and again? Do they seem to you to be appropriate to the film and to the genre?