Reading Film:
Another Approach to Analysis and Writing for AP Literature and Composition

JOE DIETRICH

jrdietrichjr@gmail.com
THE MASTER'S SCHOOL
www.masterschool.org

Objective - plant seeds

1. Equip teachers/administrators with tools for defending use of film in classroom

2. Identify the language, elements and process of filmmaking

3. Offer examples of classroom opportunities

In defense of film in the classroom

- ## The reality- just ask students
  - Students read books sometimes, but watch films all the time
  - But they rarely analyze or evaluate what they are watching
- ## The truth- look around
  - The "big issues" that used to be addressed by books are now being adopted by film
  - Present culture and worldviews are influenced by film
- ## The party line- it's not a bad thing
  - Teaching thinking skills
  - Making better citizens
  - Media literacy standards

NCTE standards

- 1. Students read a wide range of print and **non-print texts** to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
- 3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of **other texts**, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and **visual language** (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
- 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation**), media techniques**, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- 7.Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and **non-print texts**, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
- 8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, **video**) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
- 12. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a **variety of literacy communities.**
- 13.Students use spoken, written, and **visual language** to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
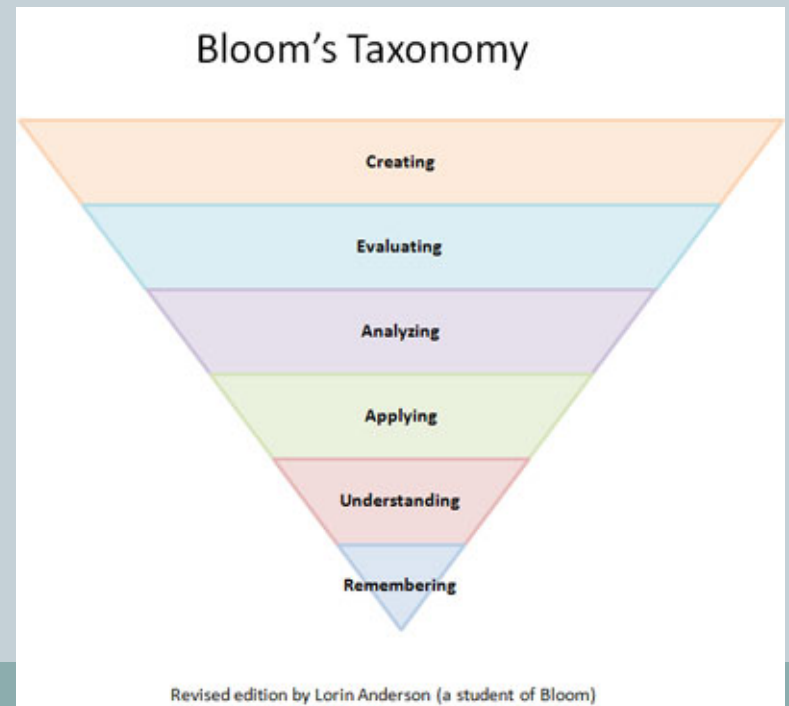
Thinking Skills

- Bloom's taxonomy – see
  http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html

Cognitive: mental skills (*Knowledge*)

Affective: growth in feelings or emotional areas (*Attitude*)

Psychomotor: manual or physical skills (*Skills*)

Bloom's Taxonomy

Creating

Evaluating

Analyzing

Applying

Understanding

Remembering

Revised edition by Lorin Anderson (a student of Bloom)

The language of film

- Visual
  - Concrete images
    - Ideas must take visual form
    - Less room for interpretation?
  - Manipulated images
    - moods created through lighting, framing & editing
    - role of Director, D.P. & Artistic Director
  - Action driven
    - not thought (except v.o.)
    - role of Director, Choreographer & Editor
    - passage of time?

The Language of Film

- Auditory
  - Diegetic- sound is part of the world on film (on or off screen)
    - Dialogue
    - Sound effects from actual events
    - Music in the scene
  - Non-diegetic- sound is outside of the film world
    - Soundtrack- music
    - Sound "effect" implying action
    - Narrator commentary- voice over

Elements of Film

Types of Shots

Long shot   A shot taken from a sufficient distance to show a landscape, a building, or a large crowd.

Medium shot   A shot between a long shot and a close-up that might show two people in full figure or several people from the waist up.

Close-up   A shot of one face or object that fills the screen completely.

Extreme close-up   A shot of a small object or part of a face that fills the screen.

Elements of Film

Camera Angles

High angle   The camera looks down at what is being photographed.

Eye level   A shot that approximates human vision; a camera presents an object so that the line between camera and object is parallel to the ground.

Low angle   The camera looks up at what is being photographed.

Elements of Film

- **Camera Movement**

  Pan   The camera moves horizontally on a fixed base.

  Tilt   The camera points up or down from a fixed base.

  Boom   The camera moves up or down through space.

  Tracking
  (dolly shot)   The camera moves through space on a
  wheeled truck (or dolly), but stays on the same plane.

  Zoom   Not a camera movement but a shift in the focal
  length of the camera lens to give the impression that the
  camera is getting closer to or farther from an object.

Elements of Film

Editing

Cut   The most common type of transition in which one scene ends and a new one immediately begins.

Fade-out / Fade-in   One scene gradually goes dark and the new one gradually emerges from the darkness.

Dissolve   A gradual transition, in which the end of one scene is superimposed over the beginning of a new one.

Wipe   An optical effect in which one shot appears to "wipe" the preceding one from the screen.

The Making of Films

- Collaborative process
  - Marriage of the arts
    - Dance
    - Painting
    - Sculpture
    - Drama & story telling
    - Photography
  - Divergent ends
    - Producer= $
    - Director= ART

The Making of Films

- Shot out of sequence
  - location shooting
  - call sheets

- Roles of a Film Crew
  - complete list- see NETC website
    http://www.readwritethink.org/
  - in-depth interviews- see PBS website
    http://www.pbs.org/hollywoodpresents/theoldsettler/prodroles/

Film & Theater

- **Assignment**-Create a chart showing how film and theater are different

- **Some questions**- What are the technical differences? What are the economics of production, of audience? How is the acting different? Which is more difficult? Which do they enjoy more & why? What is the role of the audience?

- **Assessment**- persuasive essay (or creative piece) using all three rhetorical appeals defending either film or theater.

- **For further study**- attend a well known play and then view a particular scene from a film version and discuss the differences.

Film analysis

- Techniques for analyzing
  - Simple observation and response – create chart
    - Type of shot
    - Camera angle & movement
    - Lighting
    - Sound
    - What is the prevailing emotion being conveyed & how is it being conveyed?
  - Scene hypothesis and database
    - Choose a scene that you wish to analyze. Identify the scene both by DVD chapter and timeline parameters.
    - Develop a hypothesis that you think you will be able to prove about how this scene reflects the overall cinematic style of the film. it should be one full and well-developed paragraph.
    - Now choose a film clip of no more than 30 – 60 seconds from your scene to analyze. This clip should seem to you to embody some feature that is characteristic of the film overall. In this sense, you are choosing a "key" passage.

Film Analysis

- **A. Database - Segment 1.**
  - Camera angle (straight-on, high, low, etc.).
  - Camera distance (nature of the shot – close-up, establishing shot, medium shot, etc.) and depth of field. Be specific about distance and depth of field.
  - Camera movement – pan, zoom, tracking, etc. (This may overlap number 2 in descriptive terminology)
  - Nature of the edit that begins and/or ends this segment (continuity cut, jump cut, fade, dissolve, etc. Don't just say "cut.")
  - Lighting (back lighting, side lighting, three-point lighting, etc. Is the lighting high key, low key, natural or specially set up,etc?)
  - Sound (diegetic or non-diegetic; nature of each; transcribe the dialogue for the segment; give composer and, when possible, titles for non-diegetic sound track music; describe how it functions in the scene.)
  - Mise-en-scène (how the scene is arranged) -- that is what all is in the frame (people, objects, etc) and in what configuration.

Film & Text

- Elements (analyzing)
  - Plot- storyboard- "Japanese Quince"- by John Galsworthy
  - Character- introduction- *A Streetcar Named Desire*
  - Theme & character- credits/opening- *The Great Gatsby*
  - Humor- vaudeville- *The Wizard of Oz*

Film & Text

- Adaptation (creating)
  - Setting- In what ways do the thematic elements transcend time? Cultures?
  - Plot- outlining & storyboarding
  - Characterization- backstory & dialogue
  - Screenplay – see free shareware – www.celtx.com

Film and Film

- Comparisons (evaluating)
  - Changes in culture- film history- *Othello* (noir v pop)
  - Directorial approaches- *Hamlet* (soliloquies)

Resources

http://www.davidbordwell.net/filmart/index.php - Bordwell's book, <u>Film Art: an</u> <u>Introduction</u> offers a "detailed outline of the various techniques of the medium" and offers an introduction to film aesthetics at undergraduate level

http://www.filmsite.org/filmterms1.html - AMC's comprehensive list of film terms

http://www.hhsdrama.com/litToFilm.htm - Horizon High school's Drama department has excellent information including two film courses "Film to Lit" and "Film Study" with objectives, standards (Colorado state), reading lists, and film terms

http://www.teachwithmovies.org/ - A retail outlet for lesson plans and curriculum for a variety of subject areas by integrating films. A subscription is required for a minimal fee.

http://www.webenglishteacher.com/media.html - great resource for media literacy and information Film study link has over a dozen topical links with descriptions of the contents in those links

http://www.readwritethink.org/ NCTE resources for classroom (including helpful lesson plans) and professional development

Resources

http://www.ncte.org/consultants/golden information about John Golden, consultant to NCTE, including link to his books: Reading in the Dark: Using Film as a Tool in the English Classroom and Reading in the Reel World: Teaching Documentaries and Other Nonfiction Texts

http://www.mediaknowall.com/camangles.html Excellent description of use of camera in the cinematic approach to film analysis

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/masterpiece/learningresources/fic.html a guide for elements, language, adaptation and resources

http://acephalous.typepad.com/acephalous/2009/01/dark-knight-scene-analysis.html great shot analysis from Dark Knight

http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-explrn.htm - explains Kolb's learning cycle & uses it to identify different learning styles