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ABSTRACT

English is concerned with language experience, and because much of today's "language" is experienced through electronic media--television, movies, radio--film courses fall within the English curriculum. A stop-frame projector is essential for classroom analysis of such film devices as framing, establishing shots, and scene composition. Framing is a device in which the camera focuses through a bounded outline (e.g., a doorway) to reveal an important person or event; it is used to create atmosphere, to synthesize two dissimilar ideas or images in a type of "montage" effect, or to emphasize camera technique. A visual parallel to the opening sentence of a written composition, the "establishing shot" (the first important shot related to the theme of the movie) can be examined for its connection to the rest of the film. Furthermore, the visual composition of various scenes can be examined for texture, camera angles, and positions of people and objects; students can then practice composition by taking polaroid pictures of carefully planned scenes. Through examining these film techniques with the stop-frame projector, students can develop their visual imagination and critical faculties. (LH)

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Using The 16MM. Stop-Frame Projector To Teach Film Technique

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Film education, happily, is a reality in many English classes today. Many may question the wisdom of such a move, wishing to relegate film arts to a separate course of study or even to a different department. This must never occur. English has always been concerned with language experience. When we were print oriented, the language experience was communicated via books, magazines, and newspapers. Today's society is audio-visually oriented; its "language" is experienced through elec-

tronic media—television, radio, and movies. In an article entitled "A Rationale for Multi-Media Education", A. O. Hughes (Co-ordinator of English, Scarborough Board of Education) says:

> Communication is a two-way road. We *receive* information by observing (viewing, in the case of films), listening, and reading; we *send* information by speaking and writing and by creating visual images (such as making films and developing television programs). The language arts curriculum has always stressed this dual role of language—receiving and sending information. We teach young people to listen and speak, to read and write. We should also be teaching them to cope with today's incessant bombardment of visual data. The language arts program should and must help young people develop habits of perception, analysis, judgment, and selectivity in their listening to radio and recordings and in their viewing of films and television. These habits can be developed only by a carefully planned program in multi-media communication. Such a program should include both film appreciation and film-making—receiving film and sending (producing) film.

A film course must make the student aware not only of the content or "story line" but also of film technique, the structure or form by which a director achieves his art. For classroom analysis of film technique, a stop-frame projector (such as the Bell and Howell 556) is absolutely essential. How else can a class analyze a complex film sequence that appears for only two seconds? How else can the teacher illustrate framing technique especially with a class whose whole sense is not literal, but visual? How else can the teacher relate the meaning of film metaphor or the establishing shot if the frame cannot be analyzed by all instead of the perspicacious few? Yet consider how many English departments do not even have their own projectors let alone one with a stop-frame device. If film education is to achieve its ultimate potential we must be willing to budget and spend for it. (Naturally, it will be expensive in the beginning; all equipment is. But over the years, the initial cost will more than pay for itself.) The following paragraphs illustrate the potential of the 16mm. stop-frame projector as I have used it in our four-year technical eleven film course.

Framing

This is a device whereby the camera focuses through some bounded outline (frame) to reveal an important act or person. The frame may be four-sided (such as a doorway, mirror, window, or telescope), in which case, it is very easy to explain and illustrate; it may be three-sided

(such as a triangle, formed usually by material familiar to the setting or by appendages such as arms and legs); and it may be two-sided (such as formed by two upright trees, two projected shadows, or two buildings). If the frame is not four-sided, the concept becomes difficult to grasp and needs many examples, illustrations, and above all, much class involvement before the class can come to grips with the technique. Of course, the name itself is unimportant; framing is used to create atmosphere, to synthesize two dissimilar ideas about the movie by a mental process not unlike a *montage* effect, and to add to an appreciation of the director's talent as he demonstrates his camera art.

I usually explain this technique by bringing in an empty picture frame. What is it? What is its purpose? (To enclose a picture.) Why? (To set the picture off, to add to the effect of the picture, to complement the subject.) How would you define a picture frame? At this point, I hand out some film clippings and relate the idea that film is composed of frames. Why? What similarities are there between the two types of frames? What differences?

To enlarge these concepts of framing and to see the relationship of the above concepts, I have the students put their hands together to form different type frames (thumbs end-to-end, fingers straight up to form a rectangular frame |__ __| or thumbs and first fingers touching to form an oval or circular frame "( )"). By moving their hands closer to or farther from their eyes (the camera, in effect), the students may see the effect of a film frame. When their hands are close to their eyes the frame borders are actually lost, and so, by the way, is the framing technique itself. When they focus on an object with the hands away from the eyes, atmosphere or emphasis may be obtained.

The next step in their grasping process is to show them pictures that clearly illustrate different framing techniques. These pictures may be either mounted or put under an opaque projector. Simple projectuals may be used on the overhead projector. The chief aim, of course, should be to illustrate the concept quickly and effectively so that the students may apply it to an actual film situation, for it is in the film situation that their actual and final grasping takes place.

The final step is to show them a short film that they have seen before. The shortness of the film will illustrate quickly the whole concept of framing; its familiarity will help them to concentrate on the new technique and not the content. I instruct the students to yell out whenever they see a framing device being used. The NFB film "Corral" has several excellent framing shots and fits the above conditions.

As soon as the film begins the students become unusually attentive and almost immediately some one yells out, "There is a framing device."

Usually it is not, but stop the camera anyway. Give the student a pointer and let him go up and point out on the screen the actual frame. Since it is non-existent, he will be unable to do so and thus he is immediately aware of his mistake and so is the rest of the class. Resume showing the film. If they happen to miss the first framing technique, stop the film yourself and point it out to them, explaining carefully both the frame and its effect. This process should continue throughout the screening. Conclude the lesson with a homework question—"Define film frame and illustrate your definition by reference to a newspaper or magazine clipping. Attach the clipping to your notebook page."

Framing is an important and useful film technique. In "Shane", for example, the director achieves a dramatic opening—the stranger is first seen through the boy's eyes as he rides down the valley and is framed behind the antlers of the deer, the deer's antlers symbolizing strength. The deer, of course, symbolizes speed and gentleness; the trophy suggests the rugged concept of the west—hunting. In the NFB film "You're No Good" the motorcycle, one of the major symbols in the film, is framed through the rebellious boy's arm as he has it bent in a somewhat defiant pose $\overset{\circ}{\lessdot}$. Without the stop-frame projector, this important concept could not be discussed effectively.

Establishing Shot

Discuss with the students, over their moans and groans, the function and importance of the opening sentence in a paragraph. Use the overhead projector to illustrate an effective opening sentence.

Show a movie they have already seen, or one in which you have outlined the essential narrative or points that the director is trying to establish. When the first important shot relating to the theme of the movie appears, stop the projector. Discuss the shot in detail as to mood, effect, details, and point of view, photography angles, or photographic devices that are evident. Either continue with the movie or stop there and discuss the relationship of the "establishing shot" to the rest of the film. Why did the director begin here, in this way, at this point? What does the establishing shot do for the rest of the film? What is its connection?[1]

Finish with a short writing assignment on the purpose of the "establishing shot", and, by the way, emphasize the importance of their own opening sentence.

Composition

Film composition is the way a picture is put together to create a story,

a mood, or an effect. One way to begin a proper understanding and appreciation of this complex art is to have the students draw a quick sketch, using a psychological trick, as a starting point. Hand out a stencilled sheet with a square four inches by four inches in the middle. of it. Inside the square, in the very middle, is an outline of a staircase (steps only) that has one-quarter inch steps and is one and a half inches away from each diagonal corner | |. Tell them to draw anything they want in the picture, in any manner they wish. After five minutes have them exchange papers. Psychologically, the one who leaves the picture representing a staircase is usually a conformist type lacking in imagination. There are usually a few, however, who change the outline and create interesting picture compositions. Discuss these—how they represent a different and interesting way of viewing a problem.

Now give them a brief writing assignment on how they would film a scene about one of the following: Death, Anguish, Loneliness, Surprise, Joy or Happiness.[2]

Once again, have them exchange papers and mark one another's compositions both for the ideas and the way they are expressed. They might also consider the appropriateness of the content.

Now they are ready to examine film composition. Choose a film[3] which has one of these scene topics in it and, at the appropriate time, stop the camera on a frame expressing this emotion. Analyze the components of the composition: the use of shadows (film texture), camera angles, position of people and objects, aspects left out (or unspoken) or included. Always, of course, have them ask the questions *Why?* and *How?* to themselves, if not out loud. Move on a couple of frames and reanalyze the composition. How has it changed and what is the effect? This process should be repeated as often as necessary to help them appreciate the director's problem and skill. Attention will always be high because the students are actively involved.

For homework, give then some pictures or magazines (perhaps have them work in pairs) and have them analyze the visual composition of an ad, photo, or painting.

The final step in their appreciation is to have them the next day divide into small groups of threes or fours and take polaroid pictures of some

[1]The same technique may be used to discuss and show "film continuity" and the "closing shot". Films should never be divorced from the English program—there are too many similarities. One must be careful, however, to treat film as a separate art form with its own vocabulary and uniqueness.

[2]My thanks to Austin Redpath for this idea. See A. Redpath, *Mass Media and You,* (Longmans Canada Limited, 1966), p. 160.

[3]Some appropriate NFB films are "Overture", "The Boy Next Door", "Phoebe", "Where Mrs. Walley Lives".

carefully thought out subjects. They will need to be reminded that it is the film composition they should be stressing.[4] Some simple subjects are an egg, a hand, a foot, and some books. Be sure to have several groups do the same subject so that you may compare them afterwards. The advantages of the polaroid camera (in this case, the inexpensive "Swinger") are numerous. You have the benefit of instant comparison (easily shown on an opaque projector) and discussion, as well as the automatic interest factor of taking pictures that are developed immediately. Although I borrowed one of the student's cameras for this project, I would strongly recommend that this be a feature of every English budget as well; the uses are limitless.

The students' inexperience (as well as imagination) is readily apparent since they tend to forget the use of shadow and good lighting as well as interesting camera angles. If you have an audio-visual technician or a good photographer in the school, you might ask him to take part in the "composition" discussions. The students appreciate another voice and they like to show off their handiwork.

These suggestions on film teaching are just some of the many ways of approaching a film course. Although there are as many methods as there are films, the stop-frame projector is essential equipment for teaching film as film art in our classrooms.

[4]I used this method, in detail, with my four-year technical eleven students as a prelude to making our own movie. It was highly successful.