

Bridging Backwards: Linking Film Genre to Fiction

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Background

As a reading teacher, I see the achievement gap between students and their reading abilities slowly increasing each year. The problem? Although it cannot be attributed to one direct cause, the media has certainly contributed in widening this gap. In a 2003 poll shared in class, researchers detailed the percent of media users in six to seventeen year olds in the following breakdown:

- 99% - watch TV
- 86% - listen to music
- 81% - watch videos
- 64% - play computer games
- 57% - read non-school books
- 36% - use non-game computer
- 28% -read the comics
- 19% - surf the web

This same research showed that the typical adolescent consumes on average 4.5 - 5 hours/day on the computer, playing computer games, watching TV/video/DVD's, and listening to music. Today's teacher will attest to the rising challenge of teaching students who are constantly bombarded with media, often leaving them overstimulated. The classroom teacher, coach, and parent all compete with media for the attention of the student. Therefore, styles of teaching, coaching, and parenting are changing with the generation of students in the 21st century. In the classroom, video and technology use has soared - as it should. Introductions to units and topics of study are often done with CD and DVD. In my reading class where the goal is "to become a better reader than you already are", I fight the same battle for the attention of my students. But how can I use the media to help advance literacy development in my students?

Based on the statistics listed above, I have concluded several things. First, today's adolescent is typically more media literate than print literate. Second, it is now more common to have a wide genre of films in the home than of a wide selection of age-appropriate books. And finally, it is more convenient to sit a child in the front of the television set than to spend valuable time reading books. With this in mind, I am opting to change my approach to literature. Since movies and films are becoming the foundation in homes today, why not use the media rich minds we have sitting in our classrooms to help them become better readers. So rather than read the book before watching the movie, why not watch the movie before reading the book?

Overview

This unit of study is designed for the middle school student (specifically seventh grade). The concept of Bridging Backwards connects movies and books in a less traditional method. The students will learn to identify concepts of literature in films before transferring their knowledge to fiction texts. From film to

fiction, or as some might say, from Blockbuster to books, students in this unit will study genre characteristics of both film and fiction. While discovering these aspects of literature and film, students will also be introduced to the beginning elements of filming critique and technique.

Critical Vocabulary - Characteristics of Film

1. Setting - the time and place
2. Character - central/secondary person(s) to the storyline.
3. Plot - the conflict(s) occurring in the storyline.
4. Iconography - visual images that appear throughout the history of the genre.
5. Mood - the overall tone/atmosphere created in the film.
6. Cinematic Style - technical aspects of film including film shots, camera angles, camera movement, lighting, editing, and sound.

Film Shots - the single image captured by running film through a camera and turning it on, then off; individual shots must be joined together (edited) to form a sequence (series of shots).

Camera Angles - the degree to which the camera is looking up or down at the subject in the shot.

Camera Movement - ability of the camera to move including tracking (camera follows subject horizontally through space), pan (camera following subject horizontally on a fixed based - back and forth), tilt (mounted camera moves up or down from a fixed base).

Lighting - technique using light to create mood/atmosphere/tone (shadows, floodlight, back lighting, spotlight)

Editing - the way images are joined side by side to form a sequence. Most common forms include straight cut, fade-in/out, dissolve, crosscutting)

Sound - includes voices of characters, objects, music from instruments, soundtrack, and various sound effects.

Critical Vocabulary - Characteristics of Fiction

1. Setting - the time and place
2. Character - central/secondary person(s) to the storyline.
3. Plot - the conflict(s) occurring in the storyline.
4. Images -symbolic use of real or inanimate objects.
5. Mood - the overall tone/atmosphere created in the film

Film Reference

High Noon, Fred Zinnemann, 1952, NR 85 min
Stagecoach, John Ford, 1939, NR 100 min.

The Maltese Falcon, John Huston, 1941, NR, 101 min.

Who Framed Roger Rabbit?, Robert Zemeckis, 1988, PG, 104 min.

Citizen Kane, Orson Welles, 1941, NR, 120 min.

Dead Poet's Society, Peter Wier, 1989, PG, 128 min.

Henry V, Kenneth Branagh, 1989, NR, 138 min.
E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial, Steven Spielberg, 1982, PG, 115 min.

Hoosiers, David Anspaugh, 1986, PG 115 min.

Remember the Titans, Boaz Yakin, 2000, PG, 114 min.

One Fine Day, Michael Hoffman, 1996, PG, 109 min.

You've Got Mail, Nora Ephron, 1998, PG, 119 min.

Iron Will, Charles Haid, 1994, PG, 108 min.

Back to the Future, Robert Zemeckis, 1985, PG, 111 min.

Young Adult Book Reference

The Ruby Raven - Michael Dahl, chapter one (p. 1-4)

Call Me Frances Tucket - Gary Paulson
optional *Tucket's Ride* - Gary Paulson, pages 15-22

Princess in Love - Meg Cabot, pages 193 - 197

Rewind - William Sleator chapter one

DogSong - Gary Paulson chapter four (p. 56-58), chapter five (p. 66-69)

Jason's Gold - Will Hobbs chapter one

Snowboard Maverick, Matt Christopher
optional *Stealing For Girls*, Walter Dean Myers, last section

GENRE UNIT- Bridging Backwards: Using film to better understand fiction

Part One - Establishing Purpose

1. Brainstorm meaning of “genre” with class. Discuss examples shared by students (books or movies).
2. Go over syllabus with class (worksheet 1a)

3. ACTIVITY - GENRE STATIONS

- Select 30 young adult fiction books (5 from each genre selected by teacher)
- Divide students into 6 groups
- Each group rotates to all stations guessing the genre represented at the station.
- Record information on back of syllabus (worksheet 1b)
- Discuss guesses with class

4. Minilesson - Key Characteristics of Fiction Books (worksheet 2b)

TRANSITION: THE GOAL IS TO BECOME EXPERTS OF IDENTIFYING THESE CHARACTERISTICS IN EACH BOOK YOU READ. OUR METHOD TO ACCOMPLISH THIS IS TO FIRST BECOME EXPERTS IDENTIFYING THESE CHARACTERISTICS IN FILMS/ MOVIES. FILM AND FICTION BOOKS HAVE VERY SIMILAR CHARACTERISTICS. IF YOU CAN IDENTIFY THEM IN FILM, YOU CAN IDENTIFY THEM IN BOOKS.

Part Two - Characteristics of Film

1. Minilesson - Define key characteristics of film (worksheet 2a)
2. Spend time discussing term six - “cinematic style.” Explain that although this is not the primary goal of the unit, a basic exposure film technique/critique is helpful to better understand films.
3. ACTIVITY - CINEMATIC STYLE - students can write down terms as notes
 - Breakdown each part of cinematic style
 - Discuss film shots and camera angles - show Dead Poet’s Society clip of student sharing poem.
 - Discuss camera movement - show clip of Henry V’s (K. Branagh) St. Crispin’s Day speech.
 - Discuss duration of shot - show clip of crop dusting scene in *Citizen Kane*.
 - Discuss lighting - show beginning minutes of *Citizen Kane*.
 - Discuss editing and sound - show clip of *E.T.* at the beginning noting differences in setting (from forest to house).

Part Three - From Blockbuster to Books: The Western Genre

1. Review terms of film characteristics
2. Choose and view a clip from Stagecoach allowing students to adjust to viewing this genre.
3. Minilesson - Characteristics of Western Film (worksheet 3a)
 - In groups, have students fill in guesses/ideas of traditional western film characteristics. Facilitate pacing between terms if necessary.

- Talk through chart of characteristics with students. Students may fill in missing ideas and examples on the worksheet.
- Explain to look for characteristics in the following clips (worksheet 3b). Pause as needed for students to write down observations. (Optional: replay several times looking for one characteristics at a time) -Setting/Characters - show first 2-3 minute clip of *Stagecoach*. - Watch *High Noon* - use part or whole
- Discuss observations

Part Four - Bridging Western Film to Western Fiction

1. Hand out class set of excerpts (Tucket's Ride or Call Me Frances Tucket). Each is coded for characteristics being observed.
2. Choose one excerpt and read aloud as a class. Write down observations (worksheet 4).
3. Students will independently read and write down notes before sharing answers.

TRANSITION: WE HAVE JUST COMPLETED THE JOURNEY FROM FILM TO FICTION USING THE WESTERN GENRE. LET'S NOW USE THE DETECTIVE/MYSTERY GENRE ON A MORE INDEPENDENT LEVEL.

Part Five - From Blockbuster to Books: The Detective/Mystery Genre

1. Review film characteristic terms.
2. View clip from *The Maltese Falcon* allowing students to adjust to viewing this genre.
3. Miniesson - Characteristics of Detective/Mystery Film (worksheet 6a)
 - In groups, have students fill in guesses/ideas of traditional detective/mystery film characteristics. Facilitate pacing between terms if necessary.
 - Talk through chart of characteristics with students. Students may fill in missing ideas and examples on the worksheet.
 - Explain to look for characteristics in the following clips (worksheet 6b). Pause as needed for students to write down observations. (Optional: replay several times looking for one characteristics at a time) - Watch *The Maltese Falcon* - opening scene - Watch *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* - beginning at 46:30 - use part or whole
 - Discuss observations

Part Six - Bridging Detective/Mystery Film to Detective/Mystery Fiction

1. Hand out class set of excerpts (*The Ruby Raven*). Each is coded for characteristics being observed.
2. Choose one excerpt and read aloud as a class. Write down observations (worksheet 5).
3. Students will independently read and write down notes before sharing answers.

Part Seven - OPTIONAL ASSESSMENT ON CHARACTERISTICS OF FILM/FICTION

Part Eight - From Blockbuster to Books: The Sports, Time Travel, Romantic Comedy, and Adventure Film Genres

1. ACTIVITY - JIGSAW

- Introduce the Jigsaw Method of Teaching to the class - assign students to a “home group” of four members. Each member must select a different genre to study. Put names on worksheet 7b)
2. Set up 8 stations (2 stations of each genre) -ideally there will be 3 students at each station. Students in the “home group” may decide which genre to research or they can be assigned (teacher discretion).
 3. Dismiss “home groups” to meet in stations to brainstorm ideas about characteristics of their genre. (Worksheet 7a) Facilitate pacing between terms if necessary.
 4. Pass out the “Characteristic Key” to each station. Have one student read the characteristics out loud while the other students fill in notes (as done previously).
 5. Dismiss students to report back to their “home group.” Each member now has been taught about a genre and will proceed to teach each other what they learned. Taking turns, students will share their information. Each member will record the information in the report box (Worksheet 7b).

6. ACTIVITY - CLIPS OF GENRES

- View clips from Sports, Sci-Fi/Fantasy, Romantic Comedy, and Adventure Films to support group learning. Students record observations as their genre is viewed.
- Sports - watch clip from *Hoosiers* or *Remember the Titans*
- Time Travel - watch clip from *Back to the Future*
- Romantic Comedy - watch clip from *One Fine Day* or *You’ve Got Mail*
- Adventure - watch clip from *Iron Will*

Part Nine - Bridging Sports, Time Travel, Romantic Comedy, and Adventure Films to Sports, Time Travel, Romantic Comedy, and Adventure Fiction

1. Hand out class set of excerpts with handout (worksheet 8a). Each home group must have one of each genre. Each is coded for characteristics being observed.

SPORTS - *Snowboard Maverick* or *Stealing for Girls*

TIME TRAVEL - *Rewind*

ROMANTIC COMEDY - *Princess in Love*

ADVENTURE - *DogSong*

2. Dismiss students back to their genre station.

3. Students will independently read and write down notes before finishing the Think, Pair, Share technique in that station.
4. Dismiss students to report back to their “home group.” Each member now has been taught about their genre and will proceed to teach each other what they learned. Taking turns, students will share their information. Each member will record the information in the report box (Worksheet 8b).
5. Follow up discussion with class.

Part Ten - Final Assessment

ACTIVITY - GENRE PROJECT

- Select a genre learned in class
- Select a PG or G movie and young adult book in the same genre.
- Create a PPT/Keynote demonstrating the Key Characteristics of both film/genre
- Bring in a film clip demonstrating one or more of the film characteristics
- Select an excerpt from the book demonstrating one or more of the fiction characteristics.
- Present to class