

Reading Film as Complex Text

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Review

What strategies do we use to help students dig into / read closely a traditional complex text?

(Core Actions 1-3)

Reading Film

We are used to watching films purely for entertainment. When we watch in this way, we are mostly passive observers of the action, not really thinking much beyond our feelings and impressions of what is on the screen. As scholars, though, we have to be more diligent in how we treat a film. A film is something we can read just as carefully and consciously as a book or poem.

Text-Specific & Dependent

Analyzing Traditional Complex Text

- Literal/figurative meanings
- High vocabulary load
- Archaic or non-traditional language, syntax, or structure
- Need for background knowledge

Analyzing Film as Text

- Composition
- Shot structure
- Sound, music
- Editing
- Repetition
- Historiography

Language to Discuss Film

- **Diegetic:** sound is part of the world on film (on or off screen) like dialogue, sound effects from actual events, music in the scene
- **Non-Diegetic:** sound is outside of the film world like a soundtrack, sound "effect" implying action, narrator commentary, voice over
- **Cut:** The most common type of transition in which one scene ends and a new one immediately begins.
- **Fade:** 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.
- **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.
- **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.

Composition and Shot



What is the director telling us with this famously composed shot?

Composition, Shot, Mood, Theme

- Film is not “realistic” just because of the life-like detail we see. The audience only experiences what the camera (director) want it to see and hear.
- The overall mood of the film is created by acting, music, lighting, sound effects, costumes, colors, sets, symbols, etc. These small details play a crucial role in the experience of the viewer.

READING FILM



COMPOSITION & SHOT

Film is not "realistic" just because of the life like detail we see. The audience only experiences what the camera (director) want it to see and hear.

Is the director using a long shot, a medium shot, a close up, or an extreme close up?

Is the shot taken from a high angle, a low angle, or from eye level?

Is the camera placed in an "objective" location, or does it represent the point of view of one of the characters?

Does the camera move or does it stay in place?

What do you notice about the lighting, the props, and the placement of actors? Is something implied going on off screen?

NOTES & REASONING

As you take notes on composition, shot, mood, and theme, jot down what you think the filmmakers are trying to do/say with their choices. Be prepared to defend your analysis with specific evidence from the film.

MOOD & THEME

Consider the overall mood of the film as created by acting, music, lighting, sound effects, costumes, colors, sets, etc. These small details play a crucial role in a film.

Does the film utilize effects like voiceovers, text, or direct addresses to the camera?

Does the director use long takes in a scene or does he/she divide the scene up with many short takes?

Does the editing make for a unified and continuous effect (i.e., you don't really notice it) or is it jarring or destabilizing?

Is there a recurring song, music, color, camera technique, or special effect that adds meaning to the film?


What imagery is used to develop the story and focus your attention?

What symbols are used? Why?

Iron Jawed Angels, 2004, directed by Katja von Garnier for HBO

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtUY-wVLdeY&list=PLHGnqsoGggqtMqPnqTOrrroMWPdfu_EJi6&index=6
1. Watch the 4 minute clip and take notes on the Reading Film graphic organizer.
 2. Discuss your notes with a partner for 1 minute.
 3. Watch the clip again with sound and take further notes on the Reading Film graphic organizer.
 4. Share your notes with a partner.

1. Meet in group of four to fill out Historical Thinking Chart for Source A, the film clip.
2. Split reading/note taking for Source B and C between group members.
3. Share your Historical Thinking notes from Sources B and C.
4. Together fill out the Corroboration section.

Historical Thinking	Source A	Source B	Source C
Sourcing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who created this? • Do I know the creator's perspective? • When, where, and why was it created? 			
Contextualization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does knowing when and where it was created help me understand it? • What was different then? What was the same? • How might this affect its content? 			
Corroboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the documents agree? If not, why? • What are other possible documents? • What documents are most reliable? Why? 	 <p>Save for final analysis of 3 sources.</p>		
Close Reading <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What claims are made? • What evidence is used to support the claims? • What important words, phrases, images, symbols does the author use to persuade the audience? 			

Film: *Iron Jawed Angels*

Primary Sources: ad, pics, news

Film Review in History Journal

Text Specific Questions

- Read through the steps for *Writing Text Specific Questions To Help Students Uncover the Complexities of a Film Source*.
- In your group discuss,
 - What specific question would we ask students to answer for the film clip?
 - What specific question would we ask on each source (B & C)?
 - What specific question could we ask to help students synthesize all of the sources?

Final Writing Prompt

- Using sources A-C, develop a solid claim statement that can be supported by at least three pieces of evidence. Write a paragraph with this claim, evidence, and reasoning that connects the evidence clearly to the claim and expands your thinking.
- Using sources A-C, develop a solid counterclaim statement based on two pieces of evidence. In a paragraph with reasoning, explain why this counterclaim is not valid or is not as strong as your claim.

Reflection

- In which units and for what film (clips) might this approach work well?