



Yale-New Haven
Teachers Institute®

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2003 Volume I: Geography through Film and Literature

The City Symphony: The Original Reality Show

Guide for Curriculum Unit 03.01.11

by Angelo J. Pompano

The City Symphony, whose roots go back to the every day images recorded by Auguste and Louis Lumière in the 1890's, came into being with *Manhatta* in 1921. City Symphonies are motion pictures that capture the spirit and uniqueness of a city by assembling images of everyday life in that city. The genre comprises silent, black and white, avant-garde films that took the documentary film a step further by putting it in the realm of the art form. As in a symphony, they have movements that vary in pace and intensity. These movies bombard our sight with images of a city (images that often are quite surrealistic) in order to capture its heartbeat and expose its soul. This genre of film, usually made by experimental filmmakers such as Dziga Vertov and Walter Ruttmann, was a perfect marriage of the medium of filmmaking and the subject matter of cities, since both were products of a 19th century modernity that peaked in the 1920s.

This unit allows students to create a video documentary of their school in the style of the City Symphonies. As with the original City Symphonies which were as much about artistic creation as they were about documenting urban society, this unit is as much about creating art as it is about comparing the intricate social system of a school to that of a city.

The students will record the many "behind the scenes" activities that go on between the time that their breakfasts are delivered in the wee hours of the morning and the late night PTO meetings that go on long after they have gone home. They will see that these activities come together as do the movements in a symphony, to give them a quality education.

(Recommended for Video Production, Social Studies, Art and Music, grades 7-8.)

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