



Watching, Writing, and Learning: Watching Film and Writing Film Essay as an Introduction to the Elements of Narrative Structure, Character Development, and Causal Logic

Curriculum Unit 05.01.05

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Introduction/Rationale

As the lead teacher for Creative Writing at Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School, I have one overarching objective for the Creative Writing faculty (including myself): make the students write and keep them writing. It sounds so simple, but as you know, it is not. Most students, teachers and other sentient beings fear writing. The question is why?

Having conducted several years' worth of unscientific research on the question of why humans fear writing I have come to the conclusion that it is almost always based on the fact that humans fear they have nothing intelligent, original, or even minimally useful to say. Hence there is a great deal on the line when one sits down to write, or even speak, in an academic setting. Having nothing to say is tantamount to an admission of total ignorance, and who in their right mind would want to admit that, in school, and on paper no less.

The vast majority of our students are not ignorant far from it. In fact the majority of them possess nascent intelligence of astounding potential. And often they know it. But for a wide variety of reasons, which are not necessary to recount here, they have not been taught to think, question, and reflect. This lack of practice in the essential elements of learning makes the process of finding the inner diamond, and cutting it for brilliance, all the more painful for both teacher and student. And yet, I have observed and experienced success with my students whenever I challenge them to think, question, reflect, and write (or speak). In fact, the higher I set their goal, the harder they work to show me they can perform. No, my classroom is not in Disneyworld and mine are real students. They fight me, fight with me, ignore me, and occasionally sleep through my directions. But I hold this truth to be self-evident: most human beings prefer being intellectually occupied to being bored. Whether they know it, will admit it, or not.

I want the work in this unit to challenge students to ask themselves, each other, and me, questions about the films they are seeing. I want students to ask the kind of questions that touch on how writers and filmmakers deliver meaning, message and feeling to their audience. I want my students to moan with disappointment at the end of the period when we haven't finished the film. I want them all to talk at one time about the film. I want them to stay awake. I want them to fight intellectually of course. I want them to want more.

How can we give our students the tools they need, to feel as if they have something intelligent to say? First and most important we need to give our students the **experience** of having something intelligent to say. In this regard (and many others) I agree with John Dewey's seminal (and remarkably short) book *Experience & Education*. Dewey reminds (practically warns) teachers to take into consideration the prior experience and prior knowledge of the student as part of the students' ability to absorb new experience. As he says, "...experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience." (40)

The contemporary student definitely has a prior knowledge base in viewing movies. I am not so naïve as to believe that my students (or yours) have viewed or know they want to view what I am about to suggest we show them in this unit, but in my experience, well prepared students will view what I show. Not every one of them, a percentage will fall asleep in the dark, but a percentage of them might fall asleep in the light. No unit, not even this one, is a panacea for the problems of the modern classroom.

Experience alone, however, is not enough of an educator for Dewey. In *Experience & Education* he devotes a chapter to what he calls "Progressive Organization of Subject Matter." In that chapter he creates a formula for making thought out of **experience, observation, and reflection**.

[...] the method of intelligence manifested in the experimental [experiential] method demands **keeping track of ideas**, activities, and observed consequences. Keeping track is a matter of reflective review and summarizing, in which there is both discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing experience. To reflect is to look back over what has been done so as to extract the net meanings which are the capital stock for intelligent dealing with further experiences. It is the heart of intellectual organization and of the disciplined mind. (87)

When I reflect on the construction of this unit, I use Dewey's formula as a checklist to make sure that I am, in fact, keeping track of the steps that he recommends. By parsing his formula and matching each step with the activity I expect the students to engage in, I am able to see how the scaffolding of the lesson is likely to work for the students. For the purposes of this unit I have parsed and matched Dewey's formula as follows:

- "Keeping track of ideas, activities, and observed consequences" -Students will learn a common vocabulary (Narrative Structure/CCR, Character Development/CPC etc.) and will use it for discussion, journal-keeping, and short reviews/essays.
- "Keeping track is a matter of reflective review and summarizing"Students will review each learned concept before adding a new concept. Learning will be solidified through discussion and writing (journal-keeping and short reviews/essays).
- "Reflective review [and] summarizing [with] discrimination and record of the significant features of a developing experience"Students will share their developing thoughts through group discussion, sharing of quick-writes and/or journal-entries, and short reviews/essays.
- "To reflect is to look back over what has been done [...] extract net meaning"Students will read their own journals to find formal topics and supporting evidence in order to write their short reviews/essays.
- "Intelligent dealing with further experiences"Students will be encouraged to make connections between the scaffolded lessons, their own experiences, and observations. We will also discuss the way in which the thinking and writing in this unit are methods of "critical or higher order thinking". These are skills students

expected to produce evidence of without having been taught how to recognize, or repeat them, even when they succeed at accomplishing them.

" [this is] the heart of the disciplined mind" If our goal is to have our students develop the independent ability to learn, we must model for them how our own disciplined minds observe, organize, review, reflect, and respond. And then we have to give them the opportunity to fail and succeed in their experience of that progressive series of actions.

This unit is designed as a one-size-fits-all structure. But it is worth noting that every mind is different and that it is in the experience of filling the unit structure that individual students, with the help of a teacher/facilitator, can come to an understanding of the strategies that work in building his/her own disciplined mind.

The practice of watching a series of films together (students and teacher) creates a community of people who have shared experiences. Giving the shared community the language (vocabulary) to discuss the experiences (verbally and in writing) can deepen the individual and group connection to the experience. Having the opportunity to focus on something s/he understands, doesn't understand, wants to understand better, or finds fault with, gives the student the opportunity to organize, control, and finally share (uninterrupted) his/her higher order thinking, with a group that is predisposed to comprehend it.

Target Class

The target class for this unit is the ninth grade Creative Writing class of the Cooperative Arts and Humanities Magnet High School (Co-op). This is their first high school level writing class. The students in this class are self identified writers. Even so there is usually a wide range of skill levels and abilities from students with IEP's (Individual Education Plans) to Honors level students and every kind of student in-between.

At Co-op we have the luxury of block scheduling which means that each arts period is given two standard class periods (42 minutes), back to back for a total of 84 minutes of class time, with a five minute break between periods. I predict that this unit in its full-length version will take three to four weeks of double periods. I have therefore constructed the unit in four discrete parts. The first three parts are keyed to specific films while the final part is an in-depth writing assignment. In this way a teacher with less time to devote to the unit can choose to use one or more of the films, with or without the culminating, in-depth writing assignment to accomplish his/her specific goal(s).

In order to give the teacher who intends to use this unit flexibility I have also attempted to construct the lesson plans and worksheets in a way that can be easily adapted to fit films other than the ones I have chosen. Another benefit to this method of construction is that students begin to understand that, as the playwright Eugene Ionesco said, "It's not the answer that enlightens, but the question." Hence a good set of questions can be a valuable companion as one faces the blank page whether it is for this assignment, an essay in another content area, or for a standardized test.

Strategies/Student Centered Objectives

The purpose of this unit is to give creative writing students a working understanding of some basic elements of story using a multiple intelligences approach. Students will watch films in 20 or 40 minute segments. Each segment will be preceded by a 10-minute introduction, and will be followed by a 10 minute "quick-write" or written reflection. Students will be expected to jot down notes while they are watching the films as well. Students will be prompted to pay particular attention to a specific element in each of the viewing segments. Examples of specific elements include: narrative structure (plot), character development, causal logic, visual and auditory cues, credibility, and complexity.

An underlying purpose of this unit is to prepare students for an in depth study of the Elements of the Short Story which is the unit they will proceed to directly after this one.

We will be watching films with seven primary objectives in mind:

1. To use our powers of **observation** to understand how films make meaning.
2. To learn some basic film **terminology** and to use it in conversation and writing.
3. To participate in an environment/community in which peers have a common, objective vocabulary for **critical thinking, writing, and discussion** of film/story.
4. To acquire a beginning understanding of how **narrative structure, character development, and causal logic** are used to create a story.
5. To write a series of short critical pieces leading to an in-depth **film essay** .
6. To make a **connection** between what we are learning and how we can use that learning in more than one formie: discussion, journaling, written critical review, written short essay, written (in-depth) essay, as a means of developing a process for our own creative writing, as a means of peer editing and constructive criticism, and as a means of developing a method for organizing thoughts and words into essays that meet the CAPT and SAT standards.
7. To enjoy ourselves, together.

Essential Questions

There are six essential questions I want students to ponder during this unit. Each of the first five questions (see below) corresponds to the Lesson that shares its number. So that question one: How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise en Scene keep us involved in the film, becomes a prompt to the student that reminds them what they need to be looking for, and taking notes about as they watch the first film *Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers*.

The last two essential questions are there to help the student connect everything they have learned to an in-depth writing projectthe film essay. As you can see the student will move from an overall sense of what is happening in the film (the plot) along with what audio/visual cues (clues) the filmmaker gives in Mise-en-Scene, through Character Development, Overall credibility of the film, through the part that we do (or don't) play in watching the film by willing suspension of disbelief.

Through the students' short writings, the teacher will be able to assess how well each student is, in fact, able to understand and make connections to the variety of higher order, critical thinking skills this unit seeks to teach. The six essential questions appear in order below:

1. How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise-en-Scene keep us involved in the film?
2. How do Character Development (CPC) and narrative structure (CCR/Plot) come together to create a believable and compelling film?
3. How do the characters change? Do we believe what happens to them could really happen? Do we believe people would react the way they do?
4. What can we, as writers, learn about story from films?
5. How do writers and filmmakers use narrative structure, character development and causal logic to create meaning?
6. What makes a film credible and compelling enough for us to suspend our disbelief and believe in the universe it creates?

Scaffolding of Lessons

One of the first pieces of advice I was given by a fellow teacher, Chris Voight, was to "Make sure to teach your students everything step-by-step and be careful not to leave any of the steps out. Remember they are often doing things for the first time ever and they really don't know how." This advice has been a primary influence in the way I teach and my commitment to the idea of Scaffolding lessons. I spend a great deal of time considering what order knowledge might best be acquired in. In this section I will be discussing the strategies for learning I believe will work best for this unit and why.

A Word About Process and Product Writing

Students will be exposed to two kinds of writing strategies in this unit: process writing and product writing. Most of the writing students will be expected to do in the beginning sections of the unit are process writing, i.e.: thinking on paper. This kind of writing is primarily being used to help the students organize their thinking, to help them get in the habit of writing notes and reflections (film journal), and to help them integrate what they are learning. Normally I would not require students to spell and grammar check process writing and you may choose to allow the students to write in an unedited way for the earlier activities. Also, if a student is working on process writing I don't expect the student to do any further drafts. A solid first draft is all that is required and you will note that students are using a self-assessment, not a rubric. In product writing I expect students to review and revise for clarity, organization of ideas, etc.

Toward the end of the unit when students will be writing a film essay, which is the culminating thinking and writing activity of this unit, I will expect them to be much more aware of their spelling, grammar, formatting, organization of ideas, thesis statement and conclusion. They will be given a self-assessment tool for the essay, which is a kind of a checklist so that they know what is expected of them. This self-assessment tool will be similar to the ones they have used in the earlier process writing activities. In the essay however the self-assessment tool becomes the rubric. The student uses the self-assessment tool to check their work, it will then be used by a peer editor to help the student write a second draft, I will use it to check their work and give editing advice and questions that will lead to their third and final draft and then it will be used to grade the students' work. By then we will all know it by heart, which could be a help to the students in future writing assignments.

A Polite Warning for Students

There is absolutely no reason to write a complete plot summary in any of the process or product writing we will do in this unit. First of all you don't want to be a "spoiler" telling the whole plot to an audience that might not have seen the film. Second and most important is that repeating the plot takes up a great deal of space (I know that's one reason why you do it) but it doesn't reveal ***your thinking*** about the plot, characters, causal logic, and narrative. Hence plot summaries are empty calories/straight sugar. Writing the plot summary will make you feel like

you are writing something, but in the end, you are only writing what the screenwriter already wrote. Don't do it. Thank you.

Lesson 1: Conflict, Crisis, and Resolution Equals Narrative Structure (Plot)

I believe that the most natural, hence the best way to start students thinking about Narrative Structure is to help them focus on the most basic elements of a story which are the beginning, middle, and end. Most people including high school students when confronted with a story they have never seen, read, or heard before, concentrate naturally on trying to follow the action/the plot. Clearly without a solid beginning, middle, and end a story falls flat. But what makes for a solid beginning, middle, and end? What words can we use to describe the qualities that make them powerful. Janet Burroway and Susan Weinberg, in their book, *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft*, call these key sections of a story the conflict, crisis, and resolution. (page #)

I would hope that students are not hearing this idea for the first time, in ninth grade, but they very well may be. In my classes we refer to Conflict, Crisis, and Resolution as CCR. Why? For two reasons: the first is that students like to have a slangy, catchy, slightly secretive way of remembering key elements. It makes things a bit more fun. The second reason is because it gives students an opportunity to reinforce the three words over and over.

As a teacher/facilitator I make it my business to use the acronym CCR often in conversation, and to frequently throw out the question: What does CCR stand for again? I'll write it on the board and wait until someone or several someone's call out the answer. Writing it on the board is good for the visual learners and hearing it is good for the auditory learners. Some students remember quickly, some slowly, and some not at all. For all three groups having the words and acronym repeated often fortifies their knowledge in a way that makes CCR a part of our communal vocabulary.

Film: Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers, by Nick Park

I have chosen the short (30 minutes), stop-action (claymation) film, Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers, by Nick Park as the first film in the series of films to be shown in this unit. Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers is an excellent choice to begin with because it is short which affords the students an opportunity to view the entire piece in one sitting, regardless of the length of the class period (block or single). Along with its appealing length the film is very compelling to watch for a variety of reasons including the fact that it is made in stop-action animation (claymation) which is a format not widely used at this time and so brings with it a one-of-a-kind cachet that will appeal to students. The animation is consistently impeccable and never seems jerky, or amateurish. The overall continuity of the piece is also consistent so that it is easy to fall into the universe of Wallace and Gromit without being bounced out by visual or audio cues that don't seem to fit the action.

The narrative structure of the The Wrong Trousers is also quite simple and straightforward. Wallace, a gentle, lower middle class fellow, buys a pair of technologically enhanced pants for his dog, Gromit's, birthday. The idea is that the pants will take Gromit on his daily walks. However when economic problems force Wallace to take in a mysterious and shady border (Penguin), Gromit is driven from the house by the Penguin's bizarre behavior. Once Gromit, who does a good bit of the care taking of both the house and Wallace, is out of the picture, the Penguin's nefarious plan to strap Wallace into the trousers, and have him rob the local museum of it's most valuable treasure is enacted without hindrance. Gromit returns in time to save the day and the film climaxes in a wonderfully tongue-in-cheek take off on a speeding-train-genre shoot out, which is enacted on a model train that speeds throughout Wallace and Gromit's home.

The Wrong Trousers is amusing, endearing, and has a very clear major CCR, as well as a number of smaller CCR patterns that take place in individual scenes to create the rising action of the film. The variety of CCRs available in Wallace and Gromit make it a very suitable film for beginning analysis. It is a rare 14 year old who does not find something to like in The Wrong Trousers. That is not to say that some students will not be put off by the idea of a stop-action film initially and may consider it "babyish." Generally once the film is on and the majority of students are laughing, writing, and talking about it (yes, while it's on) the gestalt of the room carries the naysayers.

Projected Length of Lesson

Because this is the first lesson in the unit, and there are a great number of ideas and activities to set up, that will later become second-nature, I project that this lesson will take three to four days, depending on how well

students integrate what they need to do and keep track of.

On day one I expect to cover the introductory elements of CCR and Mise-en-Scene, as well as have the students make their film journals. They will decorate the film journals as they see fit. I have observed that personal decoration of any type of writing journal is a major step in the commitment process of owning and using one.

On day two I expect to briefly review the ideas of CCR, Mise-en-scene, and how to use the film journal, after which I expect to show the film, Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers. Once the film is over, and before anyone can say a word, I will tell students to turn to a fresh page in their film journal and take ten minutes to quick-write about what they've seen. They can write a reflection, reaction, memory, connection, thing that touched them in some way, a like or dislike. I will go around and help students who have trouble getting started.

On day three I expect to begin the class by having students read their ten-minute quick-writes from the prior class. We will use the rest of class to write a simple, three paragraph review of Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers. I will give students a self assessment rubric/to do list that will outline for them, the elements I expect their review to contain.

Introduction To The Process and Elements to Observe

Narrative Structure: Conflict, Crisis, Resolution (CCR/Plot)

Finding a topic to write about is one of the most difficult parts of the writing process for most students. In order to both simplify the process while creating an environment in which students will have to choose a topic that requires higher order thinking I will limit the topics students can write about to Formal Topics as described by Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White in their book, *The Film Experience*. They describe formal topics as topics that,

...concentrate on forms and ideas within a film, [including] character analysis, and

stylistic analysis [...] As a formal topic, character analysis concentrates its argument on a single character or on the interactions between more than one character, while narrative analysis chooses a topic that relates to the story and its construction. Stylistic analysis offers a wide variety of topics that engage in formal arrangements of image and sound, such as shot composition, editing, and the use of sound. (486)

Essentially the Formal Topic, in all of its possible permutations, makes up the topics that students will be focusing on throughout the unit and in their Film Essay.

I will write a series of specific, model examples for each type of writing I expect the students to do. I will use the film *Finding Nemo*, directed and written by Andrew Stanton, as the basis for all model writing. I have chosen *Finding Nemo* for several reasons including the following: most students have seen it, liked it, remember it, and if they haven't it is readily available in a variety of easily accessed formats for students to watch on their own. In addition the film has the same, clear-cut qualities that we will be examining throughout this unit: strong Narrative Structure, Character Development, and Stylistic elements. The first model writing example and handout will be the analysis of the Formal Topic of Narrative using the CCR of one scene in *Finding Nemo*. This will be a well developed three paragraph essay and will give students an idea of the way in which I expect them to use supporting evidence in their writing.

Another reason for creating all writing models from Finding Nemo is that it shows students that there are many ways to write about Narrative Structure, Character Development, and Causal Logic within one film. Finally, experience has shown me that when I pull a writing model from the reading/viewing that I want the students to use they feel that I've taken the "best, easiest, smartest" example possible and "what could (they) possibly do that would be as good?" Using Finding Nemo removes that sidetrack and puts the onus on them to find there a "good" topic.

If you are not inclined to write a series of model examples, you may use a variety of handouts and activities to accomplish that task. Two other ideas I have used to give students good writing samples are:

- Using the internet, have students log onto www.rottentomatoes.com. This website provides a wide variety of reviews of films. Have the students use the search box to find reviews of any movie they have seen (on their own time) and liked. Chances are these might be movies you would never watch. No matter. We're not concerned with the quality of the film we're concerned with the quality of the review. Have the student print out and study the structure of the review. What information does the critic give the reader, and in what order. Students should read these reviews like writers, not like fans.
- Prior to beginning the unit, you (teacher) can find a well written review in a magazine, newspaper, and or on the internet. You can make copies and study the content and organization with your class.

Mise-En- Scene

Corrigan and White define mise-en-scene as,

A French theatrical term meaning literally "put on stage"; used in film studies to refer to all the elements of a movie scene that are organized, often by the director, to be filmed and that are later visible onscreen. They include the scenic elements of a movie, such as actors, lighting, sets, costumes, make-up, and other features of the image that exist independently of the camera and the processes of filming and editing. (521)

I think it is important to introduce the idea of mise-en-scene very early in the unit. Student writers generally fall into one of two categories when it comes to the kind of story details that, in film, are the mise-en-scene. They either overburden their writing with an enormous amount of detail that is not necessary or they use no detail.

Mise-en-scene is a very sophisticated idea and not an easy one to understand without some effort. However, I do not think it is at all beyond the capability of students to understand that a filmmaker, like a writer, has a myriad of decisions to make in every frame or sentence. Underneath each artistic decision is one of the primary essential questions all artists face during the creative process; what to put in and what to leave out. That is the question at the heart of the idea of mise-en-scene and the sooner, in this unit, students begin to train themselves to notice those things, the sooner they will come to see how much of any art is controlled. Without this essential understanding of the artistic process, students will have a very hard time creating credible, compelling stories of their own.

I will encourage students to keep their eyes and ears open for the elements of mise-en-scene by prompting them with questions like: what makes you look/listen? What do you see/hear? What do you think the director put in especially for you to notice and why? Do you see any recurring patterns? Are there things that don't belong that are jarring to you?

Keeping A Film Journal

The idea of mise-en-scene leads rather neatly to the activity of keeping a film journal. Where better, after all, is there to keep the kinds of observations that the mise-en-scene demands of the viewer.

Students will create a film journal using a manila file folder, lined filler-paper, and brass clips. Naturally it will take some practice for students to be able to watch a film while taking notes at the same time. But since many students assure me that they can do their homework while watching television, movies, and or listening to music, I imagine this is a skill they can hone rather quickly. At least that is the way I will pose the challenge to them.

I expect the film journal pages to have certain common elements. Every page should have the name of the film and the date in the upper right hand corner. I expect that there will be a series of pages with rough notes that are taken quickly while watching the film. I will give students a double-sided example of a film journal page that I will create based on Finding Nemo. This handout will give them an idea of what rough notes and a quick-write might look like.

I intend to give students at least ten minutes at the end of each viewing period to write a quick reflection on however much of the film they have seen so far. In the case of The Wrong Trousers students should be able to watch the entire film and have time to do a quick-write immediately following the film.

Student Assessment Activity

Students will be expected to write a three paragraph review/essay based on CCR or Mise-en-scene and using information either from their film journal or memory, as long as they can provide film-based supporting evidence. The film will be available in the classroom during the writing of the review/essay and students will be allowed to use the film if they need to. Because of the brevity of the film, I would consider running the film again, while people are working on their writing, if the students request me to.

I will give students a rubric entitled "Working Self Assessment Rubric for The Three-Paragraph Essay: CCR/plot" (see below). The rubric will give the students guidance on the various elements I expect their review/essay to contain. Some of the elements I expect to be included in the essay are: topic sentences, film based supporting evidence, a conclusion, and various basic grammatical ideals.

Before students begin writing I will read them a sample, model review/essay that I will write, based on Finding Nemo.

Students should expect to use the self-assessment rubric below to discover what they have covered in their review and what they still need to write. I have also developed a graphic organizer that the student and teacher can use to keep track of the progress of the students work. It can be found at the end of the unit. Your review should cover the following points:

Section one is worth 30 points

- I have written three paragraphs
- Each paragraph has a topic sentence
- Each paragraph has supporting evidence related to the topic sentence
- Each paragraph has a conclusion that ties together the topic sentence and the supporting evidence.
- I have written about one plot, either the main plot or a subplot
- Each of the three items in section two is worth 20 points - whole section 60 points
- I have identified and explored, in writing, the conflict of the film
- I have identified and explored, in writing, the crisis (climax) of the conflict
- I have identified and explored, in writing, the resolution (if any) of the conflict in the film
- Section three is worth 10 points
- I ran spell check
- I read the piece out loud to myself to make sure it makes sense.

Students are expected to hand in their review/essay when they believe that they have accrued 100 points. They can ask questions or ask for help at any time.

Lesson 2: Character Development and CCR

Once students have begun to become sensitized to the idea of CCR the next logical step is to bring their awareness to the part that characters play when they interact with the major and minor CCR's in the Narrative Structure.

Burroway and Weinberg write that the key elements in creating a believable character are that the character must have Credibility, Purpose, and Complexity, CPC. If a character is missing even one of those qualities, the character is likely to be either a minor, perhaps somewhat stereotypical character, or a character that we, as an audience cannot believe is realistic. Students need to learn that audiences have certain expectations that, even in a fantasy realm, characters will act within certain believable parameters. Failing to have characters act

within these parameters can cause the audience to be unable to stay in the universe being created for them. Once that happens the audience will simply stop watching or reading.

Film: Mr. Smith Goes to Washington 125 minutes

I have chosen Mr. Smith Goes to Washington, Directed by Frank Capra, as the second film in the series of films to be shown in this unit. This is perhaps an unusual choice for a contemporary group of 14 year olds, but I

believe the movie's message is very compelling to current students. Many of these students grew up watching kids shows with "save-the-environmentit's a small planet " messages, as well as their share of political corruption and turmoil. As contemporary young people they are both innocent and jaded. They want everything to be simple, kind, fare, and beautiful even though they can plainly see that it just doesn't always work out that way. They can be very like Jimmy Stewart's character: Jefferson Smith.

Yes, I know it will be a bit of a tough sell. The film is old fashioned, in black and white, and contains very elegant speech, which compared to the way student's speak now seems almost Shakespearean. Preparation for watching the film has to based on having the students understand that this is a Character Driven story. And to understand that they must observe, and take notes on the CPC of the characters.

The narrative structure and appeal of Mr. Smith Goes to Washington was perhaps best described in a review in the New York Times, by Frank Nugent, which was published on October 20, 1939, just after the film opened in New York City. He says:

Jefferson Smith came to Washington as a short-term senator. He came with his eyes and mouth open, with the blessing of the Boy Rangers and a party boss's prayer that he won't tumble to the graft clause in the bill the senior senator was sneaking into law. But Senator Smith tumbled; dazedly, because he couldn't quite believe the senior senator was less than God- like; helplessly, because the aroused political machine framed him four ways from Sunday and had him up for expulsion before he could say Jack Garner. But the right somehow triumphs, especially when there's a canny young secretary on Senator Smith's side to instruct him in the ungentle art of the filibuster and preserve his faith, and ours, in democracy.

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington is a comedy/drama and it plays that edge in a way that, I believe, will keep the students interested. The major and minor CCRs are clear and well structured, and the thematic issues give the students a lot to consider, not the least of which is how much things may not have changed over time. The film also has a strong male and female lead, which gives students of both genders someone to relate to.

Projected Length of Lesson

Because this is the second lesson in the unit, there are a number of ideas and activities to review, and keep track of as we move forward and add a new idea. I project that this lesson will take four to five days, depending on how well students integrate what they need to do and keep track of. The film is long, at 125 minutes. I have projected the flow of lessons for a class that is in block format (84 minutes). If your class is one period long (42 minutes) you will have to recalculate accordingly. I would recommend that however you show the film, try to keep the activities and scaffolding of the first and last day of the lesson intact.

On day one I expect to cover the introductory elements of CPC, and to review CCR Mise-en-Scene, how to use their film journals, as well as have a discussion about what kind of notes, reflections, and methods of organization were most useful from their prior experience with Wallace and Gromit. This introduction could take most of the first 40 minutes. I would then introduce the film and begin to watch 20 minutes of the film, allowing the class 10 minutes for a reflective quick-write at the end of class.

On day two I expect to students to share some of their quick writes as well as have a discussion about what we know so far, perhaps predict what we think might happen, and generally facilitate a discussion that will prepare us to go back into the universe of the film. We would watch 60 minutes, and then do a reflective quick write, paying particular attention to character development and CPC.

On day three I would expect to repeat the structure of day two, except in discussion I would encourage students to formulate some "wonder why" type questions. These questions could be from any point of view such as: I wonder why Capra chose to..., I wonder why Mr. Smith..., etc. Then we would complete watching the film. Take ten minutes to quick write a reflection.

Student Assessment Activity

On day four I expect students to begin writing a three paragraph review/essay based on the CPC of one of the major characters in the film using information either from their film journal or memory, as long as they can provide film-based supporting evidence. The film will be available in the classroom during the writing of the review/essay and students will be allowed to use the film if they need to.

Students will use the three-paragraph film review/essay rubric like the one they used when writing about the CCR. The rubric is entitled "Working Self Assessment Rubric for The Three-Paragraph Essay: CPC/Character Development" (see below). The rubric will give the students guidance on the various elements I expect their review/essay to contain. Some of the elements I expect to be included in the essay are: topic sentences, film based supporting evidence, a conclusion, and various basic grammatical ideals.

Before students begin writing their reviews/essays I will read them a sample, model review/essay that I will write based on Finding Nemo. My review/essay will focus exclusively on the CPC of one character. I have developed a graphic organizer that the student and teacher can use to keep track of the progress of the students work. It can be found at the end of the unit.

Students should expect to use the self-assessment rubric below to discover what they have covered in their review and what they still need to write. Your review should cover the following points:

Section one is worth 30 points

- I have written three paragraphs
- Each paragraph has a topic sentence
- Each paragraph has supporting evidence related to the topic sentence
- Each paragraph has a conclusion that ties together the topic sentence³ and the supporting evidence.
- I have written about one character

Each of the three items in section two is worth 20 points – whole section 60 points

- I have written about that characters purpose in the film
- I have written about that characters credibility in the film
- I have written about what makes the character complex, or not

Section three is worth 10 points

- I ran spell check
- I read the piece out loud to myself to make sure it makes sense.

Students are expected to hand in their review/essay when they believe that they have accrued 100 points. They can ask questions or ask for help at any time.

Lesson 3: Causal Logic and Keeping it Real

Once students have begun to become sensitized to the idea of CCR and CPC the next logical step is to bring their awareness to the idea of Causal Logic. Corrigan and White define Causal Logic as part of Character Development. They say,

Characters' thoughts, personalities, expressions, and interactions focus the action of most films and propel their narratives. In this sense characters "motivate" the actions of a film's story. Their wishes and fears produce events that cause certain effects or other events to take place; thus, the actions, behaviors, and desires of characters create the **causal logic** of a film narrative, whereby one action or event leads to or causes another action or event to follow." (224)

Many scientific studies have been done in the past several years that show teenagers brains have yet to develop the segment that helps humans to project consequences. That is one reason why the writing of teenagers often lacks Causal Logic. It's not their strong suit. Even though teenagers have difficulty in projecting causal logic in their own realities, they are often capable of following it in film and stories, especially when they are looking for it.

Film: Smoke Signals. Directed by Chris Eyre., 1988. 88 minutes

I have chosen *Smoke Signals* directed by Chris Eyre., 1988 as the third film in the series of films to be shown in this unit. This film brings together many of the ideas this unit is trying to get across to students. It has a clear CCR, each main (and a few minor) characters have full CPC's and the causal logic of the film is one that I believe high school students can relate to.

Smoke Signals was the first film produced by a Native American writer and director. Oddly the genre you are likely to find it under is Road Movie/Buddy Movie and arguably it fits those categories, but there is an inherent poetry and rhythm to the language in the film, the slow revelatory nature of the film, and the visually compelling and complex actors that you'd be hard pressed to find in a typical buddy movie. The film has all the typical elements of a buddy movie as well: a handsome teenage athlete who harbors a secret heartbreak, a geek he wouldn't normally even talk to becomes his traveling companion, and a journey they must take to

uncover and resolve the mystery and pain of a fire that changed both of their lives when they were infants. In

addition the geek is a storyteller, a word shaman, and a poet.

The film takes place in the past and present and is narrated using flashbacks.

Projected Length of Lesson

The sequence of lessons follow the same sequence as Lessons one and two, except the writing assessment that follows Smoke Signals is Lesson Four, which is the film essay.

Lesson 4: Writing the Film Essay in two to four pages.

Step One: Reading a well written film essay

As I have said earlier in the paper, it is my intention to write all of the sample papers and use them to model for students what my expectations are of their writing. I will use the film Finding Nemo as my example film. You may choose to do the same using a different film that your students have all seen, or you may choose to use reviews from another source.

Step Two: Introduction of the Self Assessment Rubric entitled "Self Assessment Rubric For A Product Oriented Film Essay" (see below) for a product oriented film essay. I have developed a graphic organizer that the student and teacher can use to keep track of the progress of the students work. It can be found at the end of the unit. The following steps

1. Search your film journal for a pattern of formal topics (pay special attention to the kind of things you tended to notice and write about in your journal do you notice the behavior of the characters, do you notice settings, do you notice the way the CCR is built?)
2. Highlight or put little sticky notes in your journal next to ideas that interest you.
3. Organize your ideas into groups based on the original six essential questions we asked earlier in the unit:
 - i. How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise-en-Scene keep us involved in the film?
 - ii. How do Character Development (CPC) and narrative structure (CCR/Plot) come together to create a believable and compelling film?
 - iii. How do the characters change? Do we believe what happens to them could really happen? Do we believe people would react the way they do?
 - iv. What can we, as writers, learn about story from films?
 - v. How do writers and filmmakers use narrative structure, character development and causal logic to create meaning?

vi. What makes a film credible and compelling enough for us to suspend our disbelief and believe in the universe it creates?

4. Brainstorm the larger points you want to write about. Use a spider-web graphic organizer or any other method that works for you, to get your brainstorming ideas down on paper.
5. Plan and set goals: choose one, two, a maximum of three ideas you want to write about.
6. Make a note-taking sheet to keep your ideas together.
7. Find supporting evidence from your film journal and put that information on your note-taking sheet.
8. Brainstorm a thesis: Look at your note-taking sheet (do one at a time if you have more than one category). Ask yourself: "What idea does my evidence point to?" or "What do I know from reading my notes?" The answer to those kinds of questions is your thesis statement.
9. Create a preliminary conclusion (What do you know now, that you didn't know before? What do you want us to know and watch for -teach us how to observe? How did all of these experiences change the way you watch a film?) The answer to those kinds of questions is your conclusion.
10. Organize and sew up a first draft. Use what you've learned by writing three paragraph essay/reviews to comprise the body sections of your essay.
11. Read your essay and decide

- a. What you can edit out because it is off point (not related to your thesis)
- b. What you need to put in because you have not supported your thesis sufficiently

12. At this point you should have 10 out of 16 actions completed on your rubric. You should also have a first draft that you can type and give to a peer editor.

13. Peer edit: Swap with a peer. Use a clean copy of the rubric to read and comment on what your

writer has done well, and what your writer needs to work on. Sign the peer edit rubric and give it back to the writer.

14. Writers must keep all copies of their drafts and rubric editing comments. The full packet will be handed in for your final grade. Just keep stapling the new papers on top of the old ones.

15. Revise according to peer editor explain why you won't

16. Once you have revised, or written a note to the teacher explaining why you didn't you can hand your essay in for teacher revision.

17. Teacher Edit Using a clean copy of the rubric, the teacher will advise on what percentage of completion you have achieved and what you need to focus on next

18. Revise according to teacher editor explain why you won't

19. Be prepared to read your final essay to the class. The class should be prepared to give positive constructive criticism to the writer.

20. Hand in your final Essay for a grade.

Author's Recommendation

Every teacher does not have the luxury of teaching a creative writing class that is structured in a double block period, five days a week. That is a lot of time to have with one group of students who have an admitted interest in writing. Even if they chose writing simply because they couldn't read music and get into the band, they still chose it.

This unit in total will probably take five to six weeks, which for some of us is a full marking period. Having said that, if you are interested in dipping into this lesson without making a commitment of that magnitude I would make the following two suggestions of where and how to best contract the unit.

Lesson One (Wallace and Gromit) makes a charming stand-alone lesson that could easily lead to reading and/or writing short story or essay. Lesson Three (**Smoke Signals**) is deeper in terms of CCR, CPC, Causal Logic, and Theme. It too would make a strong stand-alone lesson that could easily lead to reading and/or writing short story, novel, or essays.

In addition the formal essay is a complex, thought provoking, piece of writing that will require a minimum of three edits. It is a product driven piece, but the rubric presented at the end of this unit could work just as well for any other essay you would like your students to work on at any point during the year.

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Filmography:

Wallace and Gromit: The Wrong Trousers Directed by Nick Park. 1993. 30 minutes

Mr. Smith Goes to Washington. Directed by Frank Capra. 1939. 125 minutes

Smoke Signals. Directed by Chris Eyre. 1988. 88 minutes.@Text:

Working Self Assessment Rubric for The Three-Paragraph Essay: CCR/plot

Essential Question: How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise-en-Scene keep us involved in the film?

A few things to keep in mind as you write:

- Some of the elements I expect to be included in the essay are: topic sentences, film based supporting evidence, a conclusion, and various basic grammatical ideals.
- I will take points off for slang unless it is quoted from a primary or secondary source.
- Students should expect to use the self-assessment rubric below to discover what they have covered in their review and what they still need to write.
- Your goal is to accrue 100 points before you read your essay to the class.
- You may have a peer edit your work and give you recommendations on how to improve your essay.

- Pay it forward: you may and even should peer edit the work of a fellow student.
- The elements are in three sections. Each section is worth a specific number of points in the completed essay.
- Take your time...I would rather see your thinking on paper, than see your first response on paper.
- Hint: the CCR section is worth the most points and may require the most thought.
- BTW you will be reading this essay to the class.

Use the boxes to check off each item when you have completed it.

Section one is worth 30 points

- I have written three paragraphs
- Each paragraph has a topic sentence
- Each paragraph has supporting evidence related to the topic sentence
- Each paragraph has a conclusion that ties together the topic sentence and the supporting evidence.
- I have written about one plot, either the main plot or a subplot

Each of the three items in section two is worth 20 points - whole section 60 points

- I have identified and explored, in writing, the conflict of the film
- I have identified and explored, in writing, the crisis (climax) of the conflict
- I have identified and explored, in writing, the resolution (if any) of the conflict in the film

Section three is worth 10 points

- I ran spell check
- I read the piece out loud to myself to make sure it makes sense.

Note: Peer editors will circle the elements that they think you need to work on and will write you suggestions. The teacher will use a clean rubric to grade your essay.

Working Self Assessment Rubric for The Three-Paragraph Essay:

CPC/Character Development

Essential Question: How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise-en-Scene keep us involved in the film?

A few things to keep in mind as you write:

- Some of the elements I expect to be included in the essay are: topic sentences, film based supporting evidence, a conclusion, and various basic grammatical ideals.
- I will take points off for slang unless it is quoted from a primary or secondary source.
- Students should expect to use the self-assessment rubric below to discover what they have covered in their review and what they still need to write.
- Your goal is to accrue 100 points before you read your essay to the class.
- You may have a peer edit your work and give you recommendations on how to improve your essay.
- Pay it forward: you may and even should peer edit the work of a fellow student.
- The elements are in three sections. Each section is worth a specific number of points in the completed essay.
- Take your time...I would rather see your thinking on paper, than see your first response on paper.
- Hint: the CPC section is worth the most points and may require the most thought.
- BTW you will be reading this essay to the class.

Use the boxes to check off each item when you have completed it.

Section one is worth 30 points

- I have written three paragraphs
- Each paragraph has a topic sentence
- Each paragraph has supporting evidence related to the topic sentence
- Each paragraph has a conclusion that ties together the topic sentence and the supporting evidence
- I have written about one main character

Each of the three items in section two is worth 20 points - whole section 60 points

- I have identified/explored, in writing, a specific characters' purpose in the film
- I have identified/explored, in writing, a specific characters' credibility in the film
- I have identified/explored, in writing, what qualities or actions make the character seem complex and recognizably human (if they are human)

Section three is worth 10 points

- I ran spell check
- I read the piece out loud to myself to make sure it makes sense.

Note: Peer editors will circle the elements that they think you need to work on and will write you suggestions. The teacher will use a clean rubric to grade your essay.

Self Assessment Rubric For A Product Oriented Film Essay.

The essential questions are printed below in the third bullet point. Choose at least one and/or up to three questions to work with, think and write about for this formal film essay.

A few (thousand) things to keep in mind as you write:

- You will absolutely be writing at least three drafts of this essay. One for self assessment, one for peer editing, and one for your final grade.
- You may, as always come to me for help at any point, even if you just want to talk something out, outloud.
- Some of the elements I expect to be included in the essay are: a thesis, a conclusion, topic sentences that are supported by film based evidence, and standard grammatical ideals.
- I will take points off for slang unless it is quoted from a primary or secondary source.
- Students should expect to use the self-assessment rubric below to discover what they have covered in their review and what they still need to write.
- Your goal is to accrue 100 points before you read your essay to the class.
- You may have a peer edit your work and give you recommendations on how to improve your essay.
- Pay it forward: you may and even should peer edit the work of a fellow student.
- The elements are in three sections. Each section is worth a specific number of points in the completed essay.
- Take your time...I would rather see your thinking on paper, than see your first response on paper.

- BTWthis essay may be submitted for publication to the school newspaper, or otherwise submitted for display or distribution. You will be reading this essay to the class.

Use the boxes to check off each item when you have completed it.

Section one: planningthis section is worth 20 points

- Search your film journal for a pattern of formal topics (pay special attention to the kind of things you tended to notice and write about in your journaldo you notice the behavior of the characters, do you notice settings, do you notice the way the CCR is built?)
- Highlight or put little sticky notes in your journal next to ideas that interest you.
- Organize your ideas into groups based on the original six essential questions we asked earlier in the unit:

- How do the narrative structure (plot) and the Mise-en-Scene keep us involved in the film?
- How do Character Development (CPC) and narrative structure (CCR/Plot) come together to create a believable and compelling film?
- How do the characters change? Do we believe what happens to them could really happen? Do we believe people would react the way they do?
- What can we, as writers, learn about story from films?
- How do writers and filmmakers use narrative structure, character development and causal logic to create meaning?
- What makes a film credible and compelling enough for us to suspend our disbelief and believe in the universe it creates?

Section two: brainstorming/researching/organizing this section is worth 20 points

- Brainstorm the larger points you want to write about. Use a spider-web graphic organizer or any other method that works for you, to get your brainstorming ideas down on paper.
- Plan and set goals: choose one, two, or a maximum of three ideas you want to write about.
- Make a note-taking sheet to keep your ideas together.
- Find supporting evidence from your film journal and put that information on your note-taking sheet.

Section three: start writing this section is worth 20 points

- Brainstorm a thesis: Look at your note-taking sheet (do one at a time if you have more than one category). Ask yourself: "What idea does my evidence point to?" or "What do I know from reading my notes?" The answer to those kinds of questions is your thesis statement.
- Creating a preliminary conclusion (What do you know now, that you didn't know before? What do you want us to know and watch for? Teach us how to observe? How did all of these experiences change the way you watch a film?) The answer to those kinds of questions is your conclusion. Do not simply restate everything you wrote...we already read that. Tell us what you have learned.
- Organize and sew up a first draft. Use what you've learned by writing three paragraph essay/reviews to write the body sections of your essay.
- Read your essay to yourself and decide

- a. What you can edit out because it is off point (not related to your thesis)
- b. What you need to put in because you have not supported your thesis sufficiently

Section four: monitor your progress this section is worth 20 points

- At this point you should have completed sections one, two, and three on your rubric. Type your draft and give to a peer editor. No handwritten work, please.
- Peer edit: swap with a peer. Use the writer's copy of the rubric to read and comment on what your writer has done well, and what your writer needs to work on. Circle any sections that you

feel need particular expansion, improvement, or that you like. Make sure you write your peer notes explaining why you've circled specific areas. Sign the peer edit rubric and give it back to the writer.

- Writers must keep all copies of their drafts and rubric editing comments. The full packet will be handed in for your final grade. Just keep stapling the new papers on top of the old ones.
- Revise according to peer editor explain why you won't
- Once you have revised, or written a note to the teacher explaining why you didn't you can hand your essay in for teacher revision.

Section five: Complete and meet your deadlinethis section is worth 20 points

- Teacher EditUsing a clean copy of the rubric, the teacher will advise you what percentage of completion you have achieved and what you need to focus on next
- Revise according to teacher editor explain why you won't
- Be prepared to read your final essay to the class. The class should be prepared to give positive constructive criticism to the writer.
- Hand in your final Essay for a grade.

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