Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2010 Volume II: The Art of Reading People: Character, Expression, Interpretation

Better Read than Viewed? Contrasting the Novel and Film

Curriculum Unit 10.02.12
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Rationale

Today, William Shakespeare might ask, "To read or to see, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the minds" of students to suffer through the reading of a book or sit with popcorn and a drink and view a film? This question is the basis of my unit. The short answer for my inner city, middle school students in New Haven, Connecticut might seem obvious watch the movie. It's quick, passive, and visual. These are three qualities that define the middle school mindset, I would dare say, nationwide. I was surprised and shocked, though, when I posed this question to my current class because many of them actually said, "Read the novel." There is hope, I thought.

The New Haven and Connecticut Middle School Content Standards require students to reflect on texts, making judgments about the quality and meaning of the words using such recognition strategies as contextual clues, structural analysis, and inferences implicit in the narrative. But how do we, as teachers, help our students use these strategies to come to textual meaning and then decide if the piece is effective and outstanding as a piece of literature? Why is it that some students arrive at one meaning while others reach a different interpretation? What do some students "see" in the text that others do not?

How does the mind learn to interpret words on the page?

And what if we only watched the movie version of the text? Students would certainly vote for this because reading takes time, too much time, they would say. They have been exposed and conditioned to a ten second sound-bite world. Teachers across the nation are resorting to this strategy as a way of either introducing or attaching meaning to our most read novels. The text is then referred to only briefly. What happens to meaning in this case? Is meaning in film derived differently than meaning in print? What, if anything, do students as viewers miss if they rely exclusively on film for understanding? How are the nuances and subtleties so vividly described in a novel, such as facial expressions or a character's thought, translated onto the screen? Can our students "read" character actors' actions and movements explicitly enough watching film to draw intended or, at least, adequate meaning? These questions are important if their investigation, perceptions, appreciations, and knowledge are to be thorough.

A second set of content standard considerations lead students to study critical essays learning to recognize

literary conventions and devices while examining the influences of social, cultural, and historical context. These standards deal with the literature-to-life connections helping them arrive at an understanding of the human condition as it is expressed through language, imaginative images, and personal interpretation. In considering these understandings and influences in my classroom, many of my students seem to recognize similarities between characters in the story and people around them. But my students seem to go a step further and, just as they become addicted to soap operas on television, my students imagine additional meaning in which these fictional characters seem to take on a "reality" in their lives. Students talk about these characters as if they truly exist. Fiction becomes fact in their minds. What are the implications of this? Do we possibly know more about some fictional characters then we do about the many people in our lives? Or do we interpret this to mean that the novelist has imagined and then created a completely believable story about human transformation that mirrors life, as my students know it?

The literature-to-film connections also need examination and discussion. What happens to these characters as they are transformed from print to the screen? Does three-dimensionality have an effect on how characters are perceived? Are they, in a sense, more alive because we can physically see them in motion? When a novel is considered for a film, how do directors and filmmakers decide what part of this human condition appears in the movie version? Which scenes are in and which are out? Does this selective process hurt the storyline? These questions will be the topics that might be raised as this unit unfolds in my classroom. Some of these will be left unanswered. That is an intended objective, as it will cause my students to continue thinking about the literature long after our formal classroom discussion is completed.

Choosing the Text (and an accompanying good film)

This selection might seem like an easy task. Go on line, do a search for a selection of books that were made into movies, choose a book that was developed into a movie, and be done with it. Simple. But seventh and eighth grade students are an interesting bunch. They are fussy, fickle, and basically bored with just about all your choices! Or that's the face they have to wear if they want to be cool. They want to be anywhere but in school and socialization is the keynote of their existence. They are the centers of their own universe. "Me, I'm the only one who's important." The students in my school come from the "hood" where gangs, guns, violence, and instability are commonplace, so choosing the "right" book is extremely critical. As you probably already guessed, reading is not high on their list of activities so it has to be a book that hooks them quickly and speaks to them directly. Length should also be a consideration, as a large volume will be thought of as overwhelming and classroom time is always at a premium. The question becomes what should you look for when choosing novel?

A good book must be relevant to the lives of your students and help them explore some of their cultural values. It must be familiar, mundane, and even prosaic, yet show them things that they've never seen before and will not soon forget. Perhaps it gives them solutions or answers to problems that they, too, face. It has to make an impact and be understandable. It must demand an emotional response, as this will keep them engaged and, at the same time, keep them wondering why certain things happen and what's going to happen next. Finally, it must be believable because it must give order to the human condition. Character development is key. Kids want resolution in what they read so they can believe that solutions are genuinely possible in real life. After all, is this not what text connections demand?

But this is only half of the battle. The movie version must now be considered. The rating of the movie plays a part in this. If choosing an R rated movie, permission must be sought from administration first and then the parents or guardians. It is also important to believe that, after previewing the film before showing your class, you find it worth the time spent. Students will want to feel this, too. Your movie choice must not have insane narratives that twist and add surreal features that make little sense. The film cannot be long, with too many sub-plots. The story and theme need to be understandable and recognizable, not obscure. The movie you choose will definitely have an impact on your students' motivation to engage fully in the last phase of this learning process.

For all these reasons, I have chosen as my core text The Outsiders written by S.E. Hinton and the 1983 film, of the same name, directed by Francis Ford Coppola and produced by Zoetrope Studios. It is a story about opposing gangs written by an author whose own life and encounters are depicted in the incidents in the story. The characters in the novel are the same ages as my students. Ponyboy's parents were killed in a car wreck and he is left with his two older brothers. Obviously, they are poor. My students are hooked. The story is about them. It has the drama they crave. The characters will be easy to study because my students already "know" them or think they know them.

This novel is currently part of our school's classroom library selection, with enough copies for each student, and the film is accessible to me through our school media center. The film version does follow the novel's story line closely so my students won't get angry at too much filming license taken by the director. The length of each will really work in my allotted time frame. It should be noted that many of the strategies and activities designed and delineated in this unit would work well with any novel to film adaptations.

Unit Objectives and Overview

In order for students to analyze and evaluate which format, novel or film, is more effective, three standards-based objectives will be assigned to this unit: understanding character, continuing practice in writing film script, and writing a comparison essay. By investigating character, students will have to decide whether the characters portrayed are static or developing, whether they contain qualities in enough detail, and whether the characters grow and transform as people in reality do. Character will be studied in three phases: first, through the eyes of the student, next, through the eyes of the author, and finally, through the eyes of the filmmaker. Through the use of filmscript writing, students will extend their understanding of the decisions made in adapting the author's text to the filmmaker's movie. Then, using all the information gathered, students will be asked to complete a final exercise and fulfill the final objective, in which they must analyze and evaluate what they have recorded and verified to formulate an educated opinion of the merits of the novel versus the film. The method that will be employed to achieve the observational aspects of this unit is called the Stanislavski Acting Method, while the overall process of instruction is called Paideia.

The Paideia philosophy of education was developed by Mortimer Adler, building on the work of John Dewey and reaching as far back as Socrates. This philosophy defines and explains the overarching instructional techniques steering this unit. It is a scaffolding system in which each of three steps offers certain understandings that become the foundation for the next learning experience. The three steps or columns that Adler defines are: didactic instruction, which presents students with "must-know" information; intellectual coaching, which uses performance-based tasks to develop expertise in reading, writing, and observing; and

finally, seminar discussion, which provides for a forum of open-ended questioning and collaborative dialogue [1]. This philosophy, similar to the critical thinking found in Socratic teaching, is not only very appropriate, but, in fact, is essential for the students in my class. This philosophy falls directly in line with the current New Haven Language Arts Curriculum and is further explained below.

Initially, my students will be introduced to Konstantin Stanislavski and his system of acting or what some refer to as method acting. This "must know" information will allow my students a window into the heart and soul of the human condition. Understanding this system will enable students to ask, "What if I were really in this situation?" Because of this question, students will have to dig deep into themselves to access memories and emotions from their pasts. But Stanislavski also required his actors to become astute observers of people. With this charge, practice observation sheets of the "characters" in their lives will be completed. This performance-based task will provide a laser focus on appearance, behaviors, attitudes, moods, assumptions, and impressions of everyday people that actually surround my students in their community. These might be their brothers, sisters, cousins, best friends, or hated enemies. They will practice observing these people in everyday situations and decide whether any of them resemble any characters in the novel. A general description of these characters will be provided after they select and study their "subjects." A class discussion, in which their individual observations are brought to light and questions are noted, will provide the backdrop that segues into the next section.

From here we will delve into the reading of the text in earnest. Using scene summary sheets, students will chart the following: character roles in the scene, settings, unusual details that employ literary devices from the author's bag of tricks, and purpose or meaning of the scene, as well as a general summary. These sheets will be completed on the major scenes in the story. Students will also be asked to take on a director's role and suggest ways of inserting thoughts, feelings, and emotions described in the novel into a film. "What would this scene look like in the movie you are directing?"

To aid in this exercise, students will role play several scenes in which they will be asked to say one thing while knowing the opposite to be true. Observing these role playing scenes should help students recognize that body language and actions are ways in which the character's thoughts, feelings, and emotions, described in a novel, take on expression on screen and in real life. A tandem exercise designed to help with character observation of the text will ask my students to record ideas on a compare/contrast sheet, one similar to their initial observation sheets of the people in their lives. They, again, will focus on appearance, behaviors, attitudes, and moods of the major characters. This strategy should aid students in an attempt to determine the similarities and differences that exist between the novel and the film while critically evaluating these relationships.

Upon completion of our reading, students will choose one scene from their scene summary sheets. Small groups will work together to write the scene as a filmscript using the appropriate formatting. This formatting sheet is included below and was previously used by my students as they read the book Monster by Walter Dean Myers.

Finally, the class will actually view the cinematic version of the novel directed by Coppola. They will be asked to complete the second half of the comparison sheet, recording their observations about the characters in the movie this time. Having the students discuss the elements fundamental to comparison, in which similarities and differences are noted and new insights are formulated, will be essential to the final piece of this unit. With all this information in hand, students will write a compare/contrast essay expressing which medium they thought had more merit, momentum, and meaning.

This unit may seem, upon first glance, like it is too large in scope to be handled by my middle school students. A common theme that runs through all school reform of curriculum, however, is the need for students to develop the capability to solve complex problems while having the ability to construct meaning that is grounded in real world experience. The ability to listen, hypothesize, explore, test, and construct meaning is at the core of this unit and defines the underlying process described in the Paideia Philosophy. This unit is complex for this very reason.

There is need of one added note for clarity. Lesson plans for this unit are embedded within the unit as indicated by Day One, Day Two, and so forth.

Understanding the Paideia Teaching Philosophy

Students learn best when they come to knowledge and discover an idea, skill, or concept for themselves. Consider the steps involved in learning to ride a bicycle. We can tell or explain to learners how to ride a bike or even show them a video, for example. But listening to an explanation or watching a demonstration is passive and merely introduces the skills necessary to ride that bike. It is important information, but it certainly does not represent all that is required to ride a bike. Students need to actually get on the bike and practice the skills of mounting, pedaling, and braking so as to stop the bike. This step furthers the students' ability but this still does not round out their total understanding of the skill of riding. For, what happens when a fellow rider suggests that they ride into town or to a friend's house? Mentally, the "novice rider" would question, probably with much trepidation, exactly what it would take to ride in traffic, turn at corners, and think about directions all while practicing this newly developing skill. It is only after all these actions are taken and also repeated, that a complex and multi-faceted knowledge and dynamic, responsive understanding begin to take hold. This description of the process of learning to ride a bike is the same process prescribed in the Paideia teaching method. It is what the city of New Haven refers to as authentic learning. It involves all the significant tasks necessary to truly learn a new concept inside and out.

Paideia teaching techniques are divided into three distinct columns or areas of instruction: didactic, coaching, and seminar. These steps thoroughly define effective learning by utilizing each stage of the learning process. The didactic feature consists of acquisition of factual information. Students are placed in a passive role as they listen to an instructor deliver a lecture, observe a demonstration, or watch a video. In essence, it is the "telling our students how to ride the bike" piece mentioned above. The educational assessment of this kind of instruction might take the form of short answer or multiple choice questioning. Many teachers employ this method as their sole means of instruction. Students do not have the opportunity to practice or experiment with the information they received. They are the passive recipients of only one third of the learning process.

Paideia demands that students use the modeling or coaching phase to acquire expertise in reading, writing, observing, and calculating. This is the "doing" phase. Projects and significant tasks are provided to the students so that they can: practice hypothesizing, consider alternative interpretations, analyze data, trace implications, and arrive at conclusions, even if this means doing it over and over again. Teachers, at this stage of learning, coach students by providing them with positive as well as remedial or corrective feedback. This is the "practice riding" phase. Educational assessments in this stage are accompanied by rubrics and consist of graphic organizers, recording data necessary for understanding, checklists, essays, and culminating projects. They have now encountered two thirds of the learning process.

The final stage in a Paideia classroom is the seminar in which students explore expanded understandings of concepts, skills, and ideas. This stage employs intellectual dialogue in the form of class discussion or independent expression. Here, opened ended questioning provides the forum for this collaborative dialogue. Its purpose is to expand the students' ability to apply what knowledge they have discovered in phase two. This is the "rider reviewing all that he has learned so that he can ride into town" phase. The student now has completed the final step in the learning process and has the skills necessary for comprehension and further appreciation. The higher order thinking skills come to the fore as students engage in this section. Inferring, analyzing, synthesizing, connecting, and evaluating are the complex cognitive abilities employed in this final phase.

When thinking about a time reference for these steps, we need to return to our bike example. The explanation phase, step one in the process, should be brief and comprise a mere ten to fifteen percent of the total learning experience. Explaining the process can become boring and redundant and, if not completed quickly, can even "turn off" students. They're eager to get on the bike and practice. The next segment, the coaching or practicing step, demands most of our time, approximately sixty to seventy percent. Here, they practice riding the bike. They will, most definitely, fall a few times and it will be our job as teachers to give further corrective or re-directive instruction as well as encouragement. The final stage, the seminar, is the area in which the students must apply what they have learned to new experiences not yet encountered, like going into town for the first time or in the case of this unit, crafting a comparative essay in which they arrive at a conclusive answer to our title question. An overall correlation can be made here to Bloom's Taxonomy, in which students' initial exposure to a concept or skill is knowledge and comprehension-based. They then moved through the understanding and application phase, and finally to analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

This philosophic teaching method intends to address education as a personal, individual, and collective experience in which each student questions until he decides on an answer. Philosophers dating back to Socrates, Aristotle, and Plato understood the basic premise of Adler's thinking. But it also addresses the individual's role in society, in a democracy that, for our purposes, is called the classroom environment. Here, each student explores the questions that he raises both singularly and as a member of the class, in which the members of his group discuss and contribute to the overall learning process. This democratic thinking aspect might very well find it roots with Dewey. Adler would indeed be a collaborative colleague of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and Dewey in that educational forum of scholars through the ages! Stanislavski would as well.

Strategy One Character Development - Stanislavski Style

Lesson Plan One -Days One and Two: Introduction to Observation

I am going to preface my students' character study with the introduction of Konstantin Stanislavski, the father of the first acting system, referred to by some as method acting. Not only will this didactic understanding provide my students with new background knowledge but it will also give them a chance to read for information and develop observation skills. With this understanding, they might view the film with eyes more wide open because they will understand character in greater detail. This instructional step will be a one class period introduction. A brief biography of Stanislavski, appropriate in length for my students, can be found at http://www.kryingski.com/Stan/Biography/bot.html. As my students read through this piece, they will discover that Stanislavski "developed his own unique system of training wherein actors would research the situation

created by the script, break down the text according to their characters' motivations and recall their own experiences, thereby causing actions and reactions according to these motivations." [2]

At the core of the Stanislavski method lies character observation and analysis: character observation in which the actor studies human behaviors and inward, personal analysis in which the actor identifies who he really is. Stanislavski demanded that his actors explore their own inner feelings and emotions but also become acutely aware of the character's total person through intense observation. How would they accomplish this? His students would sit in train and bus stations and note every idiosyncrasy displayed by the people they observed: what each was wearing, how tall he or she was, how much each weighed, did he or she wear glasses, what was the posture of each like, what was the sound of his or her voice, did he or she walk with a particular gait, what was his or her mood like, did each have any interesting facial expressions, ticks, or unusual habits? They would then memorize and build the character in their mind from "the outside in" making note of every outward physicality, action, and sound. This understanding was derived strictly from observation without personal contact or interaction. Students then, having committed to memory each action and nuance they observed, had to constantly recall and replay the observed behaviors until they owned them. Stanislavski asked this and much more. When they read a script, they were asked to define every action and motivation of the players in the text. Who were they really? What did they feel? What was the motivation behind every action? Because the actor studied the character so intensely, understood his every movement and reason for it, and felt his every emotion, the performance attained an emotional truthfulness and psychological authenticity. This was "getting in the head" of the character. The actors were, in essence, the character from "the inside out." Stanislavski would argue that both understandings were essential to a great performance. The total character was present on stage.

In Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel, Lisa Zunshine refers to this ability to read and explain people's behavior from observing body language and thus to understand their thoughts and emotions as, "Theory of Mind." [3] She explains that people have an innate ability to interpret observed behavior using any information they bring to bear: background information, past experiences, verbal cues, and relationships insights. These interpretations seemingly happen instantaneously and perhaps unconsciously on some level, but involve a series of decisions and eliminations as to the proper "read." Stanislavski understood this long before it received an official name and used it as the basis of his acting method. It is my hope that having my students bring this "Theory of Mind" ability, or mind reading, to a more continuously conscious and articulated level will help them consider the emotional undertones and other literary cues and construct meaning that is consistent with the story. Perhaps this understanding will even transfer into their real life relationships.

Using this insight and awareness, my students will then be presented with several copies of the following graphic organizing sheet, Observing People. Their assignment will be to practice the Stanislavski method by identifying and observing three teenagers in their own lives, noting appearances, specific behaviors and moods, and attitudes that they observe. My students will respond well to this assignment, as it is a dramatic one. The following is the character study chart that the students will complete:

Observing People

Person #1_____

1. ***Appearance.***
   - hair color_____
   - hair style_____
   - eye color_____
   - height_____
   - weight_____
   - race_____
   - eyes_____
   - clothes_____
   - jewelry_____
   - glasses_____
   - other facial markers_____
   - hands_____
   - posture_____

2. ***Behaviors*** *(Is there anything memorable or unusual?)*
   - walk_____
   - smile_____
   - laugh_____
   - facial expressions_____
   - voice_____
   - sighing_____
   - sitting position_____
   - unconscious actions (twirling hair, biting nails, twitching, foot/finger tapping.)

3. ***Attitudes***
   - towards_____
   - towards_____
   - towards_____
   - towards_____

4. ***Moods*** *(I notice he is angry/frustrated/fearful/sad/defeated/etc. when…)*
   1._____
   2._____
   3._____
   4._____

5. ***Your Assumptions and impressions of this person*** *(Explain your reasons.)*
   1._____
   2._____
   3._____
   4._____

6. ***Acting like an author: (* this section represents Paideia's seminar stage – in class*)***
Using the information you gathered about this person write a paragraph describing what the person looked like, behaviors he/she exhibited, and an attitude, emotions, or mood he/she displayed.

Students will be given two days in which to complete this assignment with the last section, number six, being finished in class.

Upon completion of these worksheets, students will be presented with the list of characters including brief description of each, from the novel The Outsiders, which they will subsequently read. Using the Observing People worksheets, students will be asked to consider the following question. Do any of their observed teens resemble any of characters in the novel? In other words, is there a person who, in some important respects, resembles Jonny Cade or Ponyboy, or Cherry in their lives? Do they know a Jonny, Ponyboy, or Cherry? Because many of my students socialize outside the school setting, it will be exciting if they can actually say, "_____ acts just like Dallas or Darrell." These discussions will uncover the major resemblances of "being like Dallas," but, in the process, will also unearth the differences as well. We might reflect on how the "Ponyboy" or "Cherry" they know differs from some part of the description of that character in the novel: he or she shares these attributes, but not others. The result of this discussion would lead us to the next important question. What makes us feel a resemblance is strong enough to call someone "Ponyboy?"

The following is a basic character list that students will receive after their observation sheets, Observing People, are completed:

The Outsiders Character List

Ponyboy Curtis - 14 year old, intelligent, observant, reliable, parents killed in car crash

Darrell Curtis Ponyboy's oldest brother, 21 year old, strong, athletic, smart, quit

school to hold family together, leader of greasers, bakes chocolate cake, "superman"

Sodapop Curtis middle son, handsome, charming and fun loving, plans to marry Sandy

Johnny Cade 16 year old, black hair, large eyes, nervous, fearful, sensitive, not smart,

child of alcoholic parents

Dallas Winston tough, nicknamed Dally, came from New York gang, violent,

dangerous, proud of criminal record, protective of Johnny Cade

Two-Bit Mattews joker, shoplifter, switchblade, instigates trouble, flirt

Steve Randall Sodapop's best friend, 17 year old, works at gas station, knows cars,

cocky, intelligent, tall and lean, tough

Cherry Valance cheerleader, red hair, intrigued with Ponyboy, belongs to Socs gang

Marcia Cherry's friend, pretty, dark hair, likes the ridiculous

Randy Anderson a Soc, becomes reasonable, handsome, has pain in his life, helps

Ponyboy

Bob Sheldon dark hair, a Soc, a fighter with heavy rings, spoiled by parents

Tim Shepard leader of another gang, restless and hungry, friends with Dally

Jerry Wood teacher, calls greasers juvenile delinquents, brings Ponyboy to hospital

Strategy Two Reading the Novel Preparing for Filmscript Writing

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At this point, the class will be presented with copies of the novel. There are five activities accompanying this coaching strategy that speak to the three standards-based objectives assigned to this unit: understanding character, continuing practice in writing film script, and writing a comparison essay. Each of these experiences scaffolds to the next step and becomes the basis for further understandings as students develop critical thinking skills.

Lesson Plan Two - Day Three: Preparation for Reading

An Anticipation Guide, similar to the one that follows, will extend an opportunity for my students to express their opinions on issues and decisions that are woven throughout the story. This will set the tone and mood of the story and can surely be revisited at the end of the reading of the text.

Anticipation Guide

1. Would you quit school to support your family if your parents died? yes no

2. Would you walk alone at night in your neighborhood? yes no

3. If you were a member of a gang, would you try to date a girl/guy from another gang? yes no

4. Would you run if you committed a serious crime? yes no

After a quick, observational book talk, an activity that engages students in viewing and discussing the cover photos and short synopsis on the rear cover of the book, my students will partner up to complete a Question

Matrix. This activity comes from Janet Allen's Plugged-in to Reading series, a new program purchased by the New Haven School District to enhance the overall reading program in our city. [4] This exercise asks students to preview the title page, headings, visual entries (such as pictures, photos, and graphics), and any text features in the novel. With this information, each student pair will complete a matrix listing any series of verbs: is, can't, won't, could, would, did, might, should, and will in a column on the left side of their paper while placing the 5W plus how in row across the top of the matrix. Each group will put their entries on a master matrix.

	Who	What	Where	When	Why	How
Verb list						

The answers to this exercise provide focus questions for students as we begin our next step the oral reading of the text. It arms the students with an overall sense of the book and a framework from which to proceed.

Lesson Plan Three - Days Four through Day Sixteen: Read Aloud

The Read Aloud section of the New Haven curriculum instructs teachers to read aloud or play the book on CD for the express purpose of having students hear correct voice intonation, as well as to build listening and comprehension skills through discussion during and after reading as they gain information about the world around them. This strategy is also intended to increase their vocabulary foundation by hearing words in context, improve their memory and language skills as they hear a variety of writing styles, and help in the mastery of paraphrasing their understanding. Hearing the story read aloud also enables students to experience the mystery, charm, suspense, magic, and beauty of the language of words.

As they listen and read along, students will be asked to complete compare/contrast sheets similar to the Stanislavski observing people sheet above for each of the main characters, noting such things as appearances, behaviors, and attitudes. It must be noted that not all behaviors or attitudes will be specified for each character, so some should remain unanswered on the sheet. Because they have had experience with these, the introduction will be minimal, although it must be mentioned that these charts will be used twice, one each with the novel and the film. These charts should be divided into two columns: the first, for observations made about the characters in the text, the second, for characters in the movie. This comparison sheet will be one activity utilized by my students to assist them as they write a critical review deciding which is the more effective medium, the novel or the film.

Accompanying the read aloud will be a summary sheet of each major scene in the novel. These graphic organizers will serve students as they try to decide which scene they want to turn into a filmscript. It will also help them with their final written assignment in which they must decide which scenes should be included in the film version and which should be out, and ultimately whether the book or movie is better in their eyes. For my class, the layout of this organizer should be simple and straightforward. Students will be expected to identify and record a plot summary, list the major characters appearing in the scene, determine the narrative voice, and recognize any effective literary devices incorporated into the scene. They should also record any significant details that make them say, "Now that's important to remember" (with a reason for its significance: (1) it should/should not be in the movie; (2) it will be hard for the film writer to incorporate that idea into the film; (3) it's important to get those thoughts into the script, etc.), and the purpose or meaning of the scene. Students should decide what these reasons might look like as they begin to address this activity. It would also include how the students feel certain details might be portrayed in film. These summary sheets should be assigned for homework as a way to engage students in continuous reflection on the story.

Summary Sheet

Directions: (The goal here is to decide which scenes should be in a film)

Scene: (include major characters, narrative voice, literary devices, plot summary)

_____
_____
_____

Significant detail: (questions developed by students as mentioned above)

_____
_____
_____

Acting like a director: How would what the author writes about the character's thoughts, feelings, and emotions in this scene be portrayed in film?

Ex: I wish I could tell him that I hate it when he smokes. (character's thought) How would a film maker insert this into a movie?

_____
_____
_____

Day Seventeen through Twenty: Writing the Filmscript.

In groups of three, students will begin the process of deciding which scene they want to write as a film script. It will be the job of each group to record the process they engage in as they decide which scene they eventually turn into script, answering such questions as: which scene do we like? why do we like it? which scene do we think will make for good viewing and why?

I include this exercise in the unit as a re-enforcement assignment. In the fall of our school year, my students are required to write a filmscript after reading Monster by Walter Dean Myers. Myers' novel is written in part as a journal and in part as a filmscript. While reading the text, students are given a filmscript language sheet which lists the following terms: Angle, CU (close up), Cut to, Dissolve, Exterior, Fade out, Freeze, Hold, Interior shot, LS (long shot), Off-screen, Pan, POV (point of view), Reaction shot, Switch to, Voice over, Wide angle, and Zoom. As we read the book together, students look for each term as it appears in the text, how it is used, and then they define it. This focused exercise really draws attention to the format, purpose, and understanding of the filmscripting process.

These sheets should be placed in their students' binders so they will be readily available to use with this exercise. With this information, their filmscript formatting information, and the actual book as a reference, the groups will write the scene with appropriate set direction, specialized language, and script formatting. As a writer's workshop strategy, students will use peer editing to assist in writing the final draft. Students could also develop a rubric to be used as a scoring guide for this exercise. If time permits, students could choose several scripts and prepare these performances for the class. Using the rubric as the basis for evaluation, students can also be expected to critique the performances. I will use this experience to explain that there is a career opportunity as a performance critic if they enjoy this type of exercise.

Day Twenty Two

If a local screenwriter is available in my area and a visit can be arranged, it might be a wonderful experience for my students. Having them listen to a first-hand account of the process of filmwriting would be exciting and educational. Being able to pose questions about the trials and tribulations of this occupation might actually inspire my students to revise and edit their individual scenes.

Day Twenty Three and Twenty Five

These three days will be dedicated to the viewing of the film. Using the second column of the observing people sheet used to record character observations from the novel, students will complete this chart as they view the movie. There are several scenes that must be highlighted. The initial scene in which Ponyboy is attacked and where we meet the Curtis boys, sets up the idea of comparison. Immediately after viewing this scene, we will pause the film and discuss precisely how the novel and film compare. A point-by-point assessment will be very helpful in modeling exactly how this process should work in the essay especially as it refers to character "appearances." A second scene to key in on is the movie scene because there is an obvious distinction, the movie venue. In the book, the characters appear in a theater; in the film, it's a drive-in theater. Beyond this, they will also be exposed to several important characters, Dallas and Johnny. This scene can be used to draw attention to character "attitude." The next scene to underscore is the park scene in which Bob is killed. This scene really can speak to character "mood" mentioned on the comparison sheet. The final scene that I will emphasize is the church scene. This scene can be used to underscore the "assumptions and impressions" section on the observation sheet.

Strategy Three: The Comparative Essay

Days Twenty Six through Thirty

The compare and contrast essay is not merely a list of similarities and differences that exist between the text and film, but an advancement of critical thinking about the relationship between them. By completing this essay, my students will enhance their ability and understanding of creating a coherent essay based on a set of logical ideas. They will have to recognize the patterns of similarity and the causes and effects of difference. Hopefully, they will also realize unique insights into character as they consider how all the scenes or chapters, each with the complex relationships that exist, fit together in the narrative. Since the students were introduced to Stanislavski and completed the observation sheets, character understanding will be at the heart of their papers. Initially, they will have to formulate a thesis statement deciding which genre was more effective. Because students will generate far too many ideas, they must be reminded to use brainstorm webbing with organized clustering as a strategy. As we practice this skill for much of the year, students are familiar with the process.

With all this information, my students will then have to group ideas together in such a way so as to do justice to their theses in a logical way. It will not be enough to list just the plot and character similarities and divergences. My students must ask themselves, "so what" for every similarity and difference and analyze these for answers. What does it mean that Cherry wants to help the "greasers" even though she is dating a Soc? Why is it so important to be included in both novel and film? This is the presentation of evidence that supports and advances the thesis statement. Obviously, not all scenes or descriptions found in our book will be realized in the movie. An explanation of choices and omissions will be necessary. It will be important to consider whether a student's thesis statement is true in all cases.

Students should discuss and attempt to explain why some aspect or scene is highlighted more in the book and not in the movie. If there are totally divergent scenes in the movie, these will need explanations as well. What does this say about the strength or weakness of the movie? Do these differences say something about the various audiences, readers versus viewers?

Organizing comparative ideas is crucial for reader understanding. It might be an emphasized strategy to order argument points from least to most significant. If differences between the two genres are most important, then list similarities first. If a student thinks that the book was more effective, then he should mention the movie first. When considering comparisons, students can present them point by point, or one side in total and then the other. For my students' purposes, they could either discuss the book in total and then the movie, or proceed to a point-by-point discussion of the movie against the novel. If choosing the first organizational method, parallel construction, students should be reminded to discuss points in the same order.

An essential idea that must be emphasized is that a comparative essay is not descriptive but argumentative. Students will have to defend the position they took in their opening statement. Words like "first," "second," "next," and "finally'" usually indicate a simple recounting of ideas or scenes from the text. Students must remember that their argument must be defended with information from the genre and presented in a balanced way, perhaps proving why the opposite opinion does not stand up to scrutiny.

An outline of this essay might look something like this:

A. Thesis Statement

1. Which was more effective: novel or film?
2. Brief synopsis of story line as presented in the novel

B. Comparison of major characters as described in the novel and the film

1. Use of side-by-side character charts to aid in showing similarities/differences in description
a. argument for decisions
b. argument explaining effectiveness
2. Use of side-by-side character charts to aid in showing similarities/differences in relationships
a. argument for decisions
b. argument explaining effectiveness

C. Choices of inclusion and omission

a. argument for decisions
b. argument explaining effectiveness

D. Summation and conclusion for thesis statement

Notes

[1] Coffey, Heather. Paideia

[2] Trevor Jones and Bradley W. Bishop. Konstantin Stanislavski (1863-1938).

[3] Lisa Zunshine, Why We read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel. 11.

[4] Janet Allen. Plugged-in to Reading

Student Resources

Texts

Allen, Janet. Plugged-in to Reading. Prince Frederick, Maryland: Recorded Books. 2008. This is the New Haven, Connecticut reading program instituted 2009-2010.

Hinton, S.E. The Outsiders. New York: Bantam Doubleday. 1967. The coming-of-age story of two rival groups who are divided by their socioeconomic status. This is the main text used in this unit.

Websites

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http://www.sehinton.com/bio.html. May 10, 2010. This website supplies us with a brief biography of Susan Eloise Hinton, author of The Outsiders. It also provides an interview with the author on the making of the film.

TFK Homework Helper. http://www.timeforkids.com/TFK/media/hh/pdfs/samplepapers/comparecontrast_sample.pdf. June 20, 2010.A sample compare/contrast essay with notes to be used by students.

Teacher Resources

Texts

Allen, Janet. Plugged-in to Reading. Prince Frederick, Maryland: Recorded Books. 2008.This is the New Haven, Connecticut reading program instituted 2009-2010.

Hinton, S.E. The Outsiders. New York: Bantam Doubleday. 1967. The coming-of-age story of two rival groups who are divided by their socioeconomic status. This is the main text used in this unit.

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Coffey, Heather. Paideia. http://www.learnnc.org.lp/pages/4564. April 15, 2010.

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http://www.paideia.org/content.php/docs/hsjournalarticle.pdf. May 28, 2010. A clear cut understanding of the Paideia teaching method.

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