



HOW TO: CREATE A FILM STUDY GUIDE FOR CHILDREN

Based on research and analysis of existing film study guides we've identified that the most useful and long-lasting resources have three key characteristics:

1. They lead with the film, suggesting stimulating questions and flexible activities
2. They value what children and young people already know and understand
3. They are based on sound knowledge and understanding of teaching and learning

The tips below will help you produce high quality film education resources that will enhance children and young peoples' experiences of film, ultimately building audiences for children and young people's from around the World.

GETTING STARTED

WATCH THE FILM ATTENTIVELY FIRST

Allow yourself some unhurried time to watch the films you are focussing on, thinking especially of the point of view of the audiences that might be watching. Be led by the film, keeping focus on what is significant and special, or magical and moving. Use this, rather than a subject or curriculum, to think about how young audiences will respond to the film and to help you plan the kind of activities that will stimulate meaningful learning.

IDENTIFY YOUR AIM AND AUDIENCE

In order to have a broad appeal you may benefit from targeting a wider audience rather than a niche one. Either way, clearly state the audience at the beginning of your resource. For example, *'This education resource for the film, 'Suffragette,' is for secondary history teachers. It aims to encourage in-depth engagement with the film and stimulate creative responses.'* Or *'This resource aims to encourage children aged six to eight to engage in creative activities based on the film 'The Cat Returns.'*

LOOK FOR EXISTING RESOURCES

Don't try to reinvent the wheel! Use existing materials and check with distributors, existing networks such as ECFA or other exhibitors for opportunities to collaborate on the production of film resources. You may also be able to get help translating existing resources for European films. Be careful to check any shared or borrowed material for accuracy in translation.

YOUR APPROACH

CURRICULUM AND POLICY

While an understanding of education context is useful, if you align your content to the current or local curriculum too closely your resources will quickly date and your audience will be limited. It's helpful to make suggestions that teachers can adapt to their own needs and context but avoid being too prescriptive, for example, suggesting time allocations or directing what to say.

BE OPEN, CHALLENGING AND INNOVATIVE

To keep your resources rich and innovative, avoid stating or suggesting the obvious. Value what children and teachers already know about film and ask open, challenging questions that will prompt discussion and new ideas. Teachers and children have access to a growing wealth of digital tools that encourage playful, civic, collaborative, discursive and widely shared learning, so consider creating a mixed media resource where you can compile range of different materials that can be accessed and added to.¹

YOU ARE A VALUABLE SOURCE OF FILM KNOWLEDGE!

You are the access point for 'going behind the scenes'. Use 'Making-of' films, scripts or storyboards as an engaging way to introduce your audience to the language of film and the industry. Research and make use of marketing resources, including material from production companies and distributors. Include links to materials from other relevant media; trailers, press materials and interviews with the director all help children understand the creative decision-making involved in film and the many roles involved. You can also use your knowledge of children's films to recommend similar titles they might be familiar with and which will help them make useful connections. In addition to contemporary releases, young people can be introduced to a wealth of films using the 'if you like this, you might like....' technique.

USE FILM LANGUAGE AND TECHNICAL VOCABULARY

Children enjoy learning new and specialized vocabulary, but it's important to introduce any film language at the point the children are noticing something about the way a film is made and want to give it a name. Help the teacher to do this by providing a glossary of key terms which are relevant to the particular film.

CHOOSING YOUR CONTENT

REMEMBER THAT FILM IS A STORYTELLING MEDIUM

Whether it's a piece of archive footage, documentary or live-action short there are almost always characters, settings, plot, mood, atmosphere and themes. These narrative elements are useful concepts across storytelling forms and are a useful organisational structure for your resource, especially if it is focussed on teaching literacy.

USE TRIED AND TESTED FILM ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

Freeze frames, pausing at key moments, playing sequences without the sound and vice versa are all useful ways to help children think about the different elements of a film. You can support teachers and save them time by suggesting clips, or creating a series of stills from significant moments - make use of your film industry knowledge and contacts to gather these materials. If you are writing a resource for older media or film studies students make sure you are aware of key concepts such as narrative, genre, representation, institutions, audiences, film language, and the different ways these have been taught.²

USE POINT OF VIEW (POV)

Point of view is a distinctive characteristic of film: children's films in particular will often present the world from a child's perspective in ways that we don't often see. You could choose a sequence for analysis based on its POV, asking the children to share their ideas about how and why the film gives this impression. You can also encourage them to think about how POV is established in other media.

¹ See Henry Jerkins' work for a discussion of children and young people's engagement in online participatory cultures: https://mitpress.mit.edu/sites/default/files/titles/free_download/9780262513623_Confronting_the_Challenges.pdf

² Media and film education are long standing subjects with established theoretical framework and pedagogic practices. Be wary of definitions of media literacy that focus only on internet safety. Immerse yourself in the debates at <http://www.manifestoformediaeducation.co.uk/>

ENCOURAGE CREATIVE ACTIVITIES THAT RELATE TO THE FILM

Creative tasks and play are a valuable opportunity for children to share and compare their understanding of a film with their peers while they work, and can be much more fruitful than whole-class or group discussion. The ideas they encounter can also be used as a stimulus in craft, drawing and role-play.

Consider activities such as: devising and storyboarding a new sequence for a short film; creating a new character for an animation; a diary or social media entry from a character's point of view; a photo album of places connected to the film or drama activities inspired by the film³. Unless you have something interesting to add, avoid suggesting well-worn activities that teachers could come up with themselves.

ENCOURAGE FILMMAKING ACTIVITIES

If you are prompting children to ask 'how did they do that' about the way a film was made, give them a chance to work it out through practical production tasks - they don't have to lead to fully polished short films! See our [How To Guide on Creating Films with Children Aged 7-14](#)

ENCOURAGE CHILDREN TO USE SOCIAL MEDIA TO DISCUSS AND RESPOND TO FILMS

Social media is an important space for young people to discuss and share films in ways that connect to their every day lives, and can build to a critical mass of young people talking about film. It's also a great way to build bridges between home and school, inviting children's own cultural experiences into the classroom.

READING AND WRITING FILM REVIEWS

Reading a range of reviews can prompt discussion and productive disagreement as well as introduce children to the language of review writing in a meaningful way. But avoid suggesting *writing* film reviews as an activity for children under 11; it requires more life experience and exposure to different media and doesn't develop their understanding of the material. They will be more equipped to learn about this when they have carried out critical analysis of examples reviews, and are familiar with the conventions.⁴

OUR FAVOURITE RESOURCES

You can find examples of all our tips in these great study guides from the ECFA database. Click the title to link to the resource.

Wadja (2012)

- Clear and filmic focus on narrative.
- Representation case study for 16-19s.
- Refers to similar films.
- In-depth discussion on the importance of a bike as the starting point of a narrative.
- Exploration other bicycle-focussed films.
- Explores sexual politics of ultra-conservative KSA.
- Meaningful use of technical terms.
- Uses an interview with the director to elaborate on the link between political and character-driven narratives.

On The Way To School (2013)

- Uses images from film to reinforce the narrative of travel.
- 'Our journey to school' discussion relates to children's own lives.
- Live links in the document to the film trailer.
- Picks up on four broad philosophical quotes from the film as potential discussion points.

Elina: as if I didn't exist. (2003)

- English version of a Swedish study guide for younger children.
- In-depth discussion of specific themes followed by related questions.
- Images are used to illustrate the narrative effectively.

The Secret of Kells (UK, 2009)

- Gives historical context and significance of the real life 'Book of Kells' on which the story is based.
- Includes web references for more information.
- One of the 'pre' activities involves trying to work out the nature of a character looking at an image of it.

Antboy (2013)

- Activity 4: looking at the different changes that would be made if the film was 'Antgirl', leading to interesting questions about gender roles, production, setting and so on.

The Princes' Quest study guide and website resources

- Full engagement with the film itself.
- The resource website is divided into helpful sections.
- Interview with the director offers a rich background to the film.
- Five Teacher Resources on different subject themes.
- Activities section starts with the film and then asks questions which may elicit responses about other subjects - rather than attempting to retro-fit a curriculum point onto the film.
- Includes discussion of some technical considerations, such as how specific camera angles impact narrative.

Papas Boy (Finland/UK, 2010)

- Interesting use of a downloadable GIF to illustrate activity, presents a basic understanding of animation and moving image.

Winky's Horse (Screen Detectives Resource)

- Focus on 3Cs: Critical, Cultural and Creative
- Boldly suggests the text is watched - no 'pre'-activities
- Follows a specific analysis method; sectioning off different parts of the film that correspond to 'Detective cards' so that the class is focussed on specific conventions of film and film-making
- Class questions are focussed on "why has the filmmaker..."
- Use of camera angle glossary with accompanying illustrations
- Use of quotes and screenshots from the film as references during discussion of specific scenes.

We Shall Overcome (Danish, 2006)

- Use of full page to show shots from the film
- Activity suggestions that are broad and adaptable to age ranges
- Suggested questions are clearly posed with knowledge of the text
- Discussion of similar films.

Le Petit Nicolas

- Consistent use of high quality images from the film to explain activities
- Inventive use of images, such as adapting a screenshot to illustrate the structure of the activity.

Girlhood (2014, French)

- Proposed teacher questions prioritise the text first and the curriculum point second.
- Well presented, simple and avoids an imperative tone
- Includes an "If you like this film then you might like..." section, which helps young people to engage with this or other films based on their own experience and knowledge of films.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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CONTACT US We welcome your input!

To feedback email rebecca.parry@nottingham.ac.uk

To submit or recommend a resource to the ECFA database, or join our list of practitioners email mail@ecfaweb.org

³ Jackie Marsh and Philippa Thompson's Media Boxes

⁴ The Watershed's Rife Magazine project is a great example of teaching older students to write about film and giving them the opportunity to work in a 'community of practice', creating their own responses to film in a 'zine' format. A particularly compelling example "Inside Out" And Child Mental Health' by Leo Jay Shire is; it breaks many of the norms of film review writing and demonstrates how new voices can express fresh perspectives about film to new audiences.