

## Case study 6: Secondary School, Norfolk

### Key Stage 4 Mixed Year 10/11 BTEC Media

#### Cineliteracy Day

The objectives for the day were to explore the world of animation and to deconstruct important elements that constitute film grammar and language. The activities:

- presented a wide range of film and video texts in the classroom.
- helped to develop critical skills.
- gave pupils the opportunity to think about production processes.
- encouraged pupils to see how everything in a moving image/animation is saying something, and contributes in some way to its overall meaning.

#### Introduction to animation

Students were asked to explain how animation works and why we see movement. Key words were written onto the board and there was a good overall pre-knowledge as most pupils engaged and knew answers to the questions. It was clear that students had been introduced to animation before and/or were taught about the processes of animation. The practitioner discussed and explained the 'Persistence of Vision' theory and warmed up the group with the moving hand exercise and provided examples such as a Thaumatrope, Zoetrope and Magic Wheel.

The students were asked to list the different styles of animation they know. and came up with drawn, cut-out, model and CGI. They then tried to match production styles to examples shown by graduate students. Pupils were further encouraged to discuss: "How long does it take to tell a story or convey a message?" The term **BLIPVERTS** is introduced to the group, the concept of the micro advert which conveys a message as economically as possible. Students were led to think about different ways of telling a story.



Demonstrating: a Zoetrope



Practitioner and Class teachers

## Deconstructing films and analysing content

Pupils were shown the title sequence of the animation **Lemony Snickets, A Series of Unfortunate Events**. The practitioner encouraged pupils, through questioning, to identify its genre and intended audience, and to predict its content and message.

- Does it follow a narrative or is it more aesthetic and decorative?
- What do you think this is a title sequence for? (Film, TV programme, Cinema, etc)
- Can you tell what it is going to be about from the title sequence?
- Who is the target audience?  
(children/adults/contemporary/old/specialist audience)
- What do you think the purpose of the title sequence is?
- Does it achieve these ends?

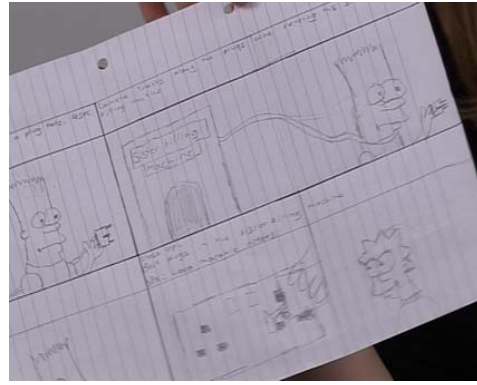
## Deconstructing 'The Simpsons': Watching the title sequence only.

The students watched the title sequence from a series they all have seen, The Simpsons. In group discussion they analysed genre, intended audience, content and message. "What information is conveyed by the title sequence?" "What do we learn about the characters?" (*Homer; father, lazy, overweight but likeable, working at a nuclear power plant. Marge; mother, housewife and community do-gooder. Bart; ten years old, anarchist and vandal with a good heart. Lisa; eight years old, super achiever, feminist, vegetarian and social activist. Baby Maggie; quietly sucking, but observing*) "How are characters formed?" Stories are usually character driven. "How do we bring a character to life and make it convincing?" This opened up a more lively conversation as all the pupils could offer answers as they *all* know The Simpsons. It seemed important to use an animation example students are very familiar with, so they could articulate personal responses to it, and compare those of others.

After showing two examples of character boards, the practitioner asked pupils to choose one of the Simpsons characters and devise their own character sheet for it. Each pupil drew their character from a number of angles, and wrote down key personality attributes. Some added a range of facial expressions. Students then had to think up a story where their character is looking for something in the house, but finds a surprise or twist ending. Students had to plan out their stories using a ten box storyboard template. This exercise was well received and students enjoyed putting themselves into the Simpson's family to think up their 'funny' story. I also noticed how quickly this group adopted new terminology and animation language, especially within their storyboards and character designs.



Storyboarding using journals



Storyboarding Bart's search for a surprise.

### How 'Wallace and Gromit' can be used to teach film grammar

Students were asked to look carefully at the different shots they can spot while watching the opening scene of **The Curse of the Were-Rabbit**. Close up, long shot, medium shots, and differing points of view, were explained carefully by the practitioner. Students were asked to think about "why did the director use a close up at this point?" In this way they developed their understanding of the underlying purposes of film grammar. The exercise also helped the students to think creatively about the types of camerawork they will employ in their storyboarding.

### Catch Me if you Can, title sequence

In a sound and image exercise the video screen was covered and pupils were asked to listen carefully to the soundtrack of a short moving image sequence and describe what they have heard. Students had to answer following questions:

- What type of text you think this is?
- What content and style do you think it has?
- How would you describe this music?
- What feelings and images does it suggest to you?
- How does the music contribute to the mood/meaning of a sequence?
- How would the sequence be affected if the music were absent or different? What exactly can you hear?
- Are the sound effects used simply to represent an action or do they contribute to the drama of the sequence?

The practitioner then showed the complete sequence and invited the pupils to discuss how sounds and images affect each other.

- What difference does the sound make to the sequence?
- What difference would it make if either the music, sound effects, or other elements were missing?
- How does sound and image combine to create specific moods?
- What contribution is made by each individual element?

- Does the sound or music change over time?
- What do the changes mean? (e.g. increase/decrease volume)

The group was invited to identify four elements within a soundtrack: music, sound effects, dialogue and atmosphere or silence. They discussed how sound can affect not only the way viewers interpret the images but also what they actually think they can see. They talked about how silence can also have a powerful effect on the interpretation of a sequence.

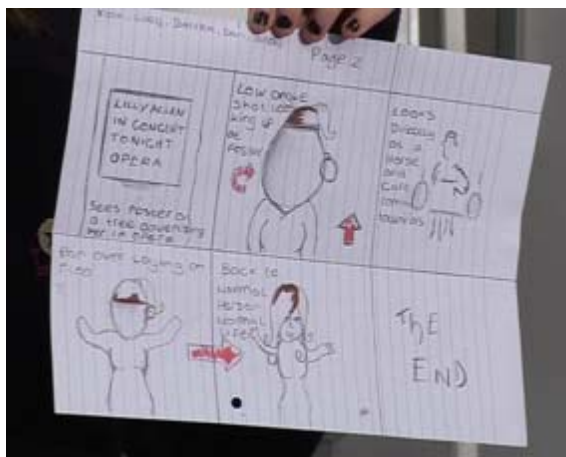
Overall this activity encouraged students to think more visually, but in certain areas of text analysis, they needed considerable support. This indicated that there is always the risk of trying to cover too much ground in a short time, and losing some students along the way! However, these year 10s were much more able to engage in analytic thought than the Year 9 Breakthrough group, who were given the same exercise.

### Music Videos

The practitioner introduced the genre of music videos and asked the pupils to list examples. She played a soundtrack and asked the pupils how they would approach this as a director. The students looked at the animatic for a **Gorillaz** song, to see how it is used to plan the timing, composition and grammar of a sequence.

Working in small teams, the students then developed ideas for their own music videos. The exercise was modelled on a real life competition to make a Robbie Williams music video. Each team member was asked to adopt an industry style role, such as director, set designer and producer. Each group then faced a panel and pitched their ideas. They were asked to explain how the video would

- target a particular age-group and why.
- sell the idea to the intended audience.
- complement the style and meanings of the selected song.
- be marketed.
- Stand out from the crowd.



Storyboard for music video



Storyboard for music video

The exercise was enthusiastically received by the groups, which each devised storyboards for animated music videos for popular songs. One group produced a character sheet and storyboard about Lilly Allen, set in Victorian London. They discussed use of black and white film to generate a sinister mood, with occasional splashes of colour to draw attention to a concert poster, and Lilly herself. The team devised a financing deal based around product advertising.

Students were equally rigorous in probing their peers, asking about the style of camerawork used, types of shot employed, and how the asking price could be justified.