

## LESSON PLAN 1 – GENRE

### 1.1 – INTRODUCTION

In this introductory session, the students will learn about the different genres of story, and the 'furniture' each genre comes with – the settings, characters and problems that form the toolkit they will be using in future sessions.

Specifically, students will be learning the elements by which genre can be identified and learn that these elements are in fact building blocks. They can be assembled, disassembled, changed, and disregarded completely.

**Genre:** Genre is a system of categorisation for stories based on similarity of theme, setting, narrative, character or mood. These categorisations are broad and they are fluid. Writers can be genres. Directors can be genres. Eras can be genres. Most stories will exist in a couple of genres to varying extents, though usually one genre will be dominant.

Though this sounds complicated, it is ironically the easiest concept to explain to 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> class because if they have any experience with a streaming service, they will know all these genres already.

Genres to the streaming generation are boxes you put stories in. Horror. Action. Adventure. Comedy. This is helpful as a foundation for their understanding, but we will be building on it as we move through the course.

## 1.2 - CLASS EXERCISE

Invite students to name as many genres as they can.

Once they have exhausted the easier ones, you can lead them to others in a variety of ways. Ask them to identify the genre of their favourite movie. Ask them to try and identify genre from a screencap of a moment from a movie. Play a Family Fortune-esque game where you challenge them to name movies or TV shows that exist in genres not already mentioned.

Once you have a strong list, you can then get students to make a list of their favourite genres and ones that they do not like as much. Ask them *what* they like about these genres. Press them to give more developed answers than 'I just like them.'

It can even be a homework assignment - ask the students to rewatch their favourite movies and identify the moments they responded to most strongly.

It is important that the students at all times feel like their opinion or their 'feeling' about an aspect of art is treated as seriously as a correct or incorrect answer might be treated in a more binary subject like Math or Science. No opinion should be presented as incorrect, but as something to discuss and debate.

If two students disagree - great! That is them having different tastes and should be celebrated.

This exercise can also be done with books, whether a class text or a group of books from the school library (or a library you visit, or whatever collection of books they may have access to)

Invite the students to try to work out what genre the books are from the description and the cover.

### 1.3 - GENRE CONVENTIONS

**Genre Conventions:** Genre conventions are elements, themes, topics, tropes, characters, situations, and plot beats that are common in specific genres. Genre conventions are what make certain stories the genre that they are. Wizards are a fantasy genre convention, as you usually see them in fantasy. Characters double-crossing each other is a genre convention of the heist genre.

These conventions can be quite elastic. *Star Wars: A New Hope* is not set in the Old West but borrows many of the genre conventions of a Western - frontier civilisations, rebelling against authority and scoundrels with good hearts.

Most importantly, these genre conventions are there for students to use in their own stories. It isn't 'copying' or 'ripping off' another story to use its conventions - it's in fact a real strength to use recognisable genre conventions in your own work.

My analogy for genre conventions is to refer to them as the 'furniture' of the genre. How do we recognise a kitchen? How do we recognise a bedroom? By its furniture. By the items and concepts and ideas we see most regularly.

Genre conventions are a signal to the reader what kind of space the story is operating in, and this allows the writer the ability to give the reader what they want.

## 1.4 - CLASS EXERCISE

Ask students to choose a genre with which they are familiar. For this example, we'll use superhero movies.

Starting with the obvious genre conventions, lead students through identifying the furniture of the superhero genre. I've included some easy ones below, but there are hundreds. A useful resource for this is the website TV Tropes, which divides up common genre conventions (or tropes) by title, genre and medium.

[Here](#) is an exhaustive list they've compiled on what you might see a lot of in superhero movies, but I've included a sample list below.

**The Training Montage:** A scene or series of scenes where the main character trains to become better with their powers. This can be played dramatically (*Batman Begins*) or for comedic purposes (*Shazam*) but the effect is the same - get our character trained up fast (faster than is plausible, really) so that so that we can see them doing cool things for the rest of the movie.

**The Person In The Chair:** When a superhero has a person in their earpiece giving them advice, technical support, gadgets or their next objective. This is explicitly called out in *Spiderman: Homecoming* but examples exist everywhere.

**The Costume Customisation:** When a hero redesigns their costume to make it more like them, often to symbolise them figuring out who they are as a person. This sounds complicated, but it's such a common story beat in superhero movies that students will immediately be able to name several, precisely because it's a particularly powerful part of visual storytelling.

## 1.5 - GROUP EXERCISE

Once students are familiar with the idea of genre and genre convention, split them into groups if you have not already.

Explain that each group is now a writers' room. Over the course of the next few lessons, they are going to be building a treatment for a movie.

Ask them to nominate one student as the head writer. It will be their job to settle disputes, keep the conversation flowing, and make sure students do not veer off track.

The first step of any treatment is to choose a genre or genres to work in. Often, the path to originality and fresh ideas is to mix two or more genres. An example of this is romantic comedies, or horror comedies, where one genre is more prominent, but the other helps provide extra entertainment or even some contrast.

Once each group has decided on their genres, you can talk through their choices, and which genre they think they will predominantly focus on, with the other acting as a sub-genre or back-up genre.

The focus here should be on **sharing of process**. Stories - particularly those for the screen - are not written in secret, or in a competitive fashion. Students should all be aware of what the other groups are writing, so that they can discuss their collective and differing approaches.

If there is a discussion or argument over more than one group doing the same genre, explain to the students that ideas aren't unique or special, it is the **execution** of those ideas that will make each one stand out.

Once they have all chosen their genre, you can ask them to write a list of their favourite genre conventions from that genre, and which ones they think they might use. Then, move onto the next lesson.